

# **LOVE AND DEATH AT HARVARD**

By Peter J. Hansen

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance between any characters in this novel and any real-life persons is purely coincidental.

Enjoy!

## CHAPTER ONE

Golden blonde hair, framing a thin face, was what first struck Henry about Elizabeth. Next he saw that she was tall, thin, graceful.

The expression on her face seemed intelligent, but more striking was that it seemed removed, as if she were bound with reluctance to what was around her.

Fortunately she was sitting in the cafeteria with someone Henry knew.

“Hi, Stephanie. Is it all right if I join you?”

“Sure, Henry, please do. Do you know each other?”

“No.” He turned to her. “I’m Henry Larson.”

“I’m Elizabeth Gagnon.”

Her voice seemed to emerge from her chest, not from her throat or nose as many voices do. Nonetheless, it was quiet, and coupled with her polite but unenthusiastic manner, it suggested a mild reluctance to speak.

Her round cheekbones, which protruded slightly on the sides of her thin face, seemed to form a foundation around which her other features had grown. She had large eyes, of an almost translucent green. Her fine golden hair came down to her shoulders, and a bit of ear sometimes peered through--a slight imperfection that made her beauty more striking.

During their conversation Elizabeth responded to questions, but volunteered little. At one point Henry noticed her gazing above him and Stephanie. He would have liked to turn around and see what she was looking at, or whether she was looking at anything in particular.

He was struck by the simplicity and intelligence of what she said, but even more by her reserve, by the impression she gave of living in a world of private feelings and thoughts.

Eventually something in him started to soften, to melt. The barrenness of his own life, the emptiness of his interactions with people and particularly with women at college, passed

through his mind. He felt, oddly enough, pity for himself.

He began to want Elizabeth to know that he too did not belong in this sort of conversation, this sort of university, this sort of world. He felt that there were a thousand things he wanted to tell her; usually he felt there were a thousand things he had to keep to himself.

Wary of appearing overly eager, he hid what he was feeling. But by the time they parted Henry felt that something important had happened to him.

For almost as long as he could remember, Henry's deepest desire had been to be "great." This did not mean for him being successful or even famous, but something bigger. It meant being one who changes the world: a Napoleon, a Lincoln, an Einstein.

Over the years Henry had formed various ideas of what his greatness would consist of. At nine he planned to be a scientist who would discover a "cure" for pollution. At 14 he began to read novelists whom he had heard described as profound, and he soon expected to be the greatest one since Dostoevsky, whom he felt to be a kindred spirit. (This feeling emerged not from any particularly clear understanding of Dostoevsky's thought, but from a feeling of kinship with the intense and frenetic atmosphere of his novels.) Later in high school he turned to political books, and eventually political greatness came to hold the dominant place in his imagination. By the time he entered Harvard College, Henry's ambition was to "rework the fabric of American society," as he liked to say to himself.

However, something was amiss in Henry's relation to the world he expected to change or dominate.

He was the only child of parents who divorced when he was quite young. He was raised by his mother, who worked full-time as a social worker and pursued advanced degrees in evening classes. He and his mother moved from Chicago to Connecticut at the time of the divorce, and afterwards Henry saw his father only once or twice a year.

His mother was 31 years old when she left her husband; she hoped to put her past behind

her and build a new life for herself. She didn't entirely know what to do with her young son, and she wasn't always able to suppress the thought that her life would be easier if she didn't have him in tow. Nonetheless, she found him relatively manageable and rather sweet. On the other hand, as he grew up he seemed to resemble his father in being timid yet grandiose, or the latter to compensate for the former—an unattractive combination. She feared that he wouldn't fare much better in life than his father was faring, and indeed he seemed to do no better at getting on with his peers.

Though he hadn't quite put the feeling into words, Henry found his mother more critical of him than attached to him. He didn't regret that they spent little time together. At school he was thrilled to find that he was possessed of gifts beyond those of other children; but he also found that few boys liked him, and many seemed to hate him. He was always the outcast, the butt of other boys' taunts, and often of their fists. Their absorption in daily boasts and battles was almost incomprehensible to him. He wasn't really surprised by their enmity, though of course he would have preferred to be left alone. (Being liked hardly seemed a possibility.)

In Henry's high school, there were separate classes for the bright students, and his intelligence and eagerness to display it inspired interest rather than dislike or resentment. He made friends with some of the other boys, and dated several girls. Meanwhile his relations with his mother grew somewhat friendlier. However, there was still nobody to whom he showed much of himself. His friends were all civilized, and some were charming; but Henry sensed that his desire for greatness would be no more comprehensible to them than it would have been to the boys he had known earlier.

He hoped for more at Harvard. Indeed he found the students there more ambitious, and somewhat more intelligent, than his high school classmates. But their ambition seemed tame: Most wanted to be successful lawyers or doctors or businessmen or scientists. Not even the few aspiring politicians or artists seemed to dream of leaving a mark on the world.

Nonetheless ambition absorbed people to the exclusion of being really open to anything else. Henry did meet a few very intelligent young men with whom he would have liked to be

friends (he put a great premium on intelligence); but to his surprise they seemed to feel they had not come all this way in order to spend their time talking. Some were friendlier than others, but all seemed more or less in a hurry. The conversations he had anticipated, with serious young people eager to discuss all sorts of things at length, never materialized. Henry found himself looking back fondly on his high school friends, who at any rate always had plenty of time for each other.

With women he fared worse. Those he found pretty paid little attention to him, or even avoided him—his eagerness to please was too obvious and indiscriminate. Although no single woman made a big impression on him, he felt dejected by his failure to make an impression himself.

Most of the socializing Henry saw consisted of desultory banter in the dining halls, and large parties with beer and blaring music. Of course smaller groups formed; Henry himself spent time with his roommates and the other boys who lived near them; but they didn't really seem all that interested in each other. Henry saw little evidence anywhere of strong one-on-one friendships. Yet this was Harvard, the best and the brightest. Wasn't there something wrong with *him* if he didn't feel satisfied socializing the way people here liked to do it?

It wasn't so much that Henry felt lonely, though he did at times; more often he felt unstable, insubstantial, vaguely in danger of collapse. To feel lonely is to imagine being close to someone, and this didn't quite live for Henry as a real possibility.

Occasionally while in social situations Henry experienced bouts of anxiety. He would feel unnatural and uneasy, and hear his own voice as if it were far away from him. Occasionally he felt as if everything around him were spinning. He learned to avoid situations in which these experiences were likely to occur, but they added to his suspicion that he was flawed in some peculiar way.

Henry liked to think that he did not feel guilt, that he pursued without qualm what he desired. It did not make sense to him to call something "wrong," unless one meant incorrect. Nonetheless he was (somewhat unwittingly) a severe judge of himself. He assumed that

emotional self-sufficiency is a normal and necessary part of being human. He had never said so to himself in so many words; but the strongest beliefs are those which haven't been put into words. The inability to flourish without intimacy appeared to him a grave weakness, one which made it impossible to call one's life one's own. He increasingly despised himself for this weakness, and he feared that it might, like a kind of insanity, veer out of control and consume his life.

At the same time, Henry was excited to find that even at Harvard his intelligence and energy stood out. He was excited as well, in a different way, by the books he read for political philosophy classes. During high school he had read descriptions of, if not works by, Locke, Marx, and Adam Smith; but the riches of Nietzsche, Rousseau, and Plato were new to him. Each of them approached politics, psychology, and philosophy in a manner unlike anything he had encountered. However, these exciting stirrings often seemed removed from his personal life, and did not prevent it from gradually taking on a darker coloring.

Meeting Elizabeth was the first event in his life which caused Henry to wonder if he could really be close to someone he knew. He doubted so delightful a hope could be realistic; but there was no doubting Elizabeth's existence, which by itself seemed possibly to make the world softer, warmer, sweeter. The entire structure of harshness surrounding him began to seem questionable, as if it might originate from within him, as if it might not be necessary.

It was not long after meeting Elizabeth that Henry said to himself, "Maybe I could love her."

As a girl Elizabeth had wondered why other girls declared so many things to be "weird" or "cool" or "cute." She never saw what the fuss was about.

Her parents, on the other hand, were rarely excited about anything. Elizabeth found them hurried, dutiful, and tired. She wondered how they had gotten into such a rut, and if it happened to everyone old.

Her two older brothers were energetic without being relentlessly emphatic. Both were athletic and popular. However, nothing in their lives seemed pleasant or moving to Elizabeth, though each evidently felt that only a fool would doubt his sense of what a person should be.

So Elizabeth kept to herself. Sometimes she dreamed vaguely about the man she would like to know. He would be reserved, for he too would have little in common with people he knew. With her he would eventually be open, but not at first. He would have a strong inner instinct of some kind; he would see things through his own eyes, or at least he would try to do so, but perhaps he would need her help. Sometimes she imagined him as older, as self-confident, as physically graceful and strong; but at other times he was young, thin, and nervous. It was then that he seemed most real, but also that his absence was most painful.

Whatever he was, he gradually became a more important presence in Elizabeth's life than anyone else. As she grew older, her reactions to characters in novels were often warmer than to anyone she actually met, but no character in a book really engaged her heart. Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* came closest: She found attractive the openness and simplicity of Prince Myshkin. She felt that she would enjoy talking to him, seeing the world through his eyes. However, he was too generally friendly for her, and there was an element of decision or moral certainty about him which made her uncomfortable.

Music was a bigger part of Elizabeth's life than reading. She was eight years old the first time she heard a mass performed, and she was astonished at its heavenly beauty. Here, she felt, was a place she would like to stay. The mass was Mozart's *Requiem*, and it seemed to answer her heart, though it also seemed to be more than she had dreamed possible.

Eventually she heard pieces yet more beautiful. Bach's choral music was to that of Mozart as the noonday summer sun to that of an autumn afternoon, insofar as such things could be compared. There were also the surprisingly varied riches of Haydn, sometimes majestic, at other times lovely; and many beautiful *a cappella* masses of earlier composers.

Her parents let Elizabeth take singing lessons, and she joined the choir of a musically-oriented Episcopal church in Philadelphia. Sunday mornings soon became the high point of

her week. She would wake up very early, put on her favorite dress, make herself breakfast and tea, and leave the house while the rest of her family slept. Then she would walk half a mile to the subway station and take a train from her suburban neighborhood into the city. The train was usually almost empty, and as she looked out the window she would hear the part she had practiced and was soon to sing. Of course hearing the whole piece at church, where the rest of the choir and the organ and sometimes other instruments surrounded and enveloped her, was another experience altogether.

The heavenly beauty of the music she heard and sang drew Elizabeth towards Christianity, but it was a private journey. Her parents never talked of such things. She loved the singing of some of the other members of the choir, and she felt that in loving their voices she loved them as well; but when the music ended, she found no more kinship with them than with other people she knew. The sermons she heard perplexed and eventually repelled her, insofar as she paid attention. But the music she loved was of sacred beauty (secular pieces moved her much less), and it accompanied sacred words. She came to feel that it was in some way a reflection of the beauty of God and His creation.

As she grew older, however, the Bible itself became an obstacle for her. It wasn't that the Bible seemed implausible, though she wasn't sure that it didn't, and she was skeptical of "allegorical" readings. But more importantly she did not find appealing the spirit of the book, or of Jesus in particular. In time the music she loved came to seem a reflection not of God but of the hearts of a few men. This change was a source of sadness; yet the palpable fact that such men had lived was a great consolation.

The solitude of Elizabeth's life wore on her as she grew older, and in time this affected her musical taste. Bach remained her great love, but while she was in college she sometimes felt her heart better understood by the luxuriantly mournful songs of some late Romantics, especially Richard Strauss, Mahler, and Hugo Wolf.

Elizabeth knew many capable performers and teachers, but when they talked about a piece of music she liked, she often felt as if it were being assaulted. When she heard discussed a



piece she particularly loved, she felt an inward panic, a fear of being acted upon by something alien and threatening, similar to what she felt if she found herself at an unexpectedly violent movie. She thought her reaction excessive, but that didn't make it go away. Only when she was alone in her room would she cease feeling that something had been sullied for her. Nonetheless she hoped to meet someone who would love music in a way she could understand.

Elizabeth found Henry Larson relatively easy to pay attention to. His appearance was interesting, and his manner was energetic and definite. Henry was six feet tall and very thin, with straight black hair setting off pale skin. Sharp, almost harsh cheekbones marked the sides of his thin face. He had large lips, hazel eyes, a firm chin. He appeared vaguely Slavic or Germanic, but the juxtaposition of black hair and pale skin made one feel he did not quite belong in any familiar category.

However, though he seemed a bit out of the ordinary, it did not occur to Elizabeth to think Henry was unusual in a way that might make him similar to her. He seemed too much in the world, too much someone who belonged, for that. When he called her the day after they met, she felt curious to see him again, but he did not remind her of what her heart longed for.

Only one man ever had. His name was Edward Webster; he had been a senior in Lowell House, the Harvard residence in which both Elizabeth and Henry lived, during her sophomore year, two years earlier. The first time she saw Edward, he looked as if he did not like the world around him, or expect to be liked by it; she wondered if he might understand the distance from others that she had always felt.

When she saw him later in a group of people, she was surprised at how comfortable he seemed. However, her first impression was not wholly belied: There was a way in which he seemed not only to be acting, but to be conscious that he was acting. She thought she detected an element of hostility in his behavior, as if he sought to outdo others in a battle of wit and poise, of showing "how to behave."

Eventually Edward asked Elizabeth out, and they dated for two months. But she did not pierce his veil. With her he was more or less as she had seen him with others, except that he would occasionally make caustic remarks about people he knew. Elizabeth found these remarks interesting, though they often seemed overly harsh to her, but her attempts to make conversation out of them didn't go anywhere.

When she said something personal about herself, Edward rarely asked questions, and never responded in kind. She once described how he appeared in social situations, the impression he gave of confronting others in a kind of battle. He replied sarcastically that they must have been "made for each other" for her to see into his heart so clearly. This was discouraging, not to say humiliating; yet Elizabeth still felt that there was a kinship between them, whether Edward recognized it or not.

The school year ended without any discussion about their having a future together. Elizabeth needed to do something during the summer, so she found a job in New York, where Edward was going to work. When they saw each other there, their conversations were even less personal than they had been at school. As a final effort, she told Edward at one point that she would be willing to stay in New York beyond the summer if he wanted her nearby, and that she still hoped something might develop between them. He replied that she should do what seemed best to her, but that it would of course be sensible for her to finish college.

After that there was no more to say. So she plodded on, dragging herself through a meaningless job, through the streets of a city she found threatening and disturbing, through a life which seemed drained of color. She began to feel as if she were on automatic pilot; at times she saw herself as if from a distance, and, forgetting herself for a moment, pitied the poor girl leading so empty a life.

On one occasion, after reminding herself that *she* was the girl leading this life, she turned her mind to the future. "I'll feel less like a robot when I no longer work eight hours a day," she thought. "But I'll still be alone. And what will life be for me after college? Will every day be like this, like today? Will I drag myself through day after day? Perhaps, or probably, I will be

25 and then 30 and then 40 and it will be the same, always the same. And that will have been my life.”

This thought was so bleak that Elizabeth recoiled, and searched her mind and heart for anything pleasant she could find. She stumbled instead upon a bitter memory. Men were often pursuing her; during her first year of college she once allowed herself to be caught. She did not feel attracted to the man, but she found him less objectionable than many, and it no longer seemed to make sense to resist men’s advances for the sake of her loneliness. But the experience was artificial, cold, and bitterly mortifying.

Elizabeth’s face burned with shame and pain as scenes from that night forced themselves upon her with a vividness that time had done little to diminish. She knew from experience that the memory would eventually recede, but that she could do little to hasten its departure.

Later that day Elizabeth decided to leave New York. She went to visit her aunt Emily, who lived in Detroit.

Emily Gagnon was a woman of 43 who, upon graduating from college 20 years earlier, had “sown her oats,” as she sometimes said, by defiantly and proudly converting to Catholicism and becoming a nun, though the Gagnons were an old Huguenot family which had long ago lapsed into irreligion. Emily was still a nun, though she no longer insisted upon Catholicism as the only path to salvation, but she lived by herself in an urban apartment, and taught at a Catholic school in a Detroit slum.

Emily intentionally cut herself off from her family when she first entered the nunnery, so she did not see Elizabeth until the latter was a girl of eight. But Emily, 30 at the time and having gained a bit of experience of the world, saw that Elizabeth would not be close to her parents, or to most of her peers. She often asked her brother to let Elizabeth visit her, and eventually it became established that Elizabeth would spend part of each summer in Detroit.

Though she was far too sensible to push anyone towards her peculiar occupation, Emily did at times hope that Elizabeth would feel called to the nun’s life. The child seemed too private and too delicate for most of the ways of life that modernity has to offer. But Elizabeth didn’t like

coming along when Emily visited the unfortunate children in her neighborhood, which, given the behavior of some of them, was perhaps not surprising, though Emily had hoped for a warmer reaction. Elizabeth did enjoy going to Church, helping to decorate it before Mass, and of course hearing the music played there, but she did not warm up to the priest or any of the other nuns.

As the years passed, Emily saw her niece as a rare flower, one that she hoped would blossom, but into what she knew not. The obvious hope, reinforced by Elizabeth's beauty, was that she would meet a man; but Emily thought that Elizabeth's private and distant manner made this a less certain prospect than it might seem.

Emily felt that she had little to offer her niece by way of example or advice. Elizabeth, however, appreciated that Emily let her be, understood her to some extent, and did not assume that she understood her when she did not. She found her aunt interesting and likeable, but she did not feel her to be someone with whom she could be intimate: Emily was somehow a bit too principled, and perhaps a bit too content, for that. If she shared her innermost feelings with Emily, Elizabeth felt, she might meet with disapproval, albeit reluctant disapproval. Nonetheless, Emily was the only person whom she genuinely considered a friend.

After leaving New York, Elizabeth needed a friend. She told her aunt more about what was happening in her life than she ever had before. Being with Emily was pleasant for her, and she accepted when Emily invited her to stay in Detroit until Christmas rather than immediately return to school. However, before long she felt that this visit was a respite from her real life, and that she was merely waiting for something to happen to her.

After Elizabeth had been in Detroit for several weeks Edward called her, to her surprise. He said he had "tracked her down" by calling her parents. She did not think much of it, until he called a second time three days later, and then every week or two during the rest of her time in Detroit.

So Edward had not forgotten her, and she found she could not forget him either. Once she returned to school, they saw each other infrequently, but she enjoyed his occasional phone calls, which were more personal than their face-to-face conversations had been. Perhaps his

interest in her would eventually grow more serious; perhaps not. She did not feel that she was in love with him, and she hoped to meet someone she would love; but a fondness for him remained, and he stood out from the drab and artificial world around her.

Elizabeth and Henry made a pleasing sight as they walked through the doors of *Chez Pierre*, a French restaurant in Harvard Square, on a Friday evening several days after they met.

Henry had made every effort: He arrived at Elizabeth's room with a dozen red roses, wearing his one suit, a dark grey pin-stripe, with a white shirt and a multicolored tie. Elizabeth wore a knee-length navy blue dress, which she had chosen because it was appropriate to a wide range of formality, and she had not known what Henry would wear; but her fair beauty was thrown into relief by a simple dark dress.

Elizabeth felt a bit nervous at the care Henry was giving this date. They had met for dinner a second time two nights earlier in the Lowell House cafeteria, at Henry's invitation, but his manner had been so controlled and intellectual that Elizabeth thought he might simply be seeking a partner for conversation. This she was willing to be, given his apparent intelligence and originality, but she didn't sense any great warmth coming from him, and she didn't understand why he was making such a fuss over their date. Though Henry seemed civilized, she began to feel wary of the end of the evening.

During the earlier meeting, their first *tete-a-tete*, Henry had wanted to be as certain as possible of making an impression, so he had led the conversation from one "serious" topic to another. He was surprised and pleased to hear her make unusually rich and precise observations and judgments. He felt certain that he would be interesting to someone with such a mind. Whether she would like him was another question; but he took heart there too, not exactly from her intelligence, but from something that was related to it, her delicacy, even her susceptibility. She showed her thoughts rather than herself, which was hardly surprising; but Henry sensed that she underestimated how much they had in common. Next time he would show more of himself.

Henry had the foresight to reserve a corner table when he called *Chez Pierre*. He and Elizabeth were dining fairly early, so their table was very quiet. On two sides they were surrounded the restaurant's dark red muslin wall hanging. The tall white candle on their table was pleasant and only mildly distracting, at least after Henry moved it to one side.

After they ordered dinner, Henry seized the conversation. "You inspired me the other evening to start reading *Anna Karenina* again. I read it when I was in high school, but I'd forgotten, or I didn't realize then, how beautiful the beginning is."

He paused for a moment, but rather than ask what he meant, Elizabeth looked at him. She found it likeable that Henry did not bother waiting on spontaneity to have the conversation he wanted, but she did not see any need to provide him with predictable responses; and she wanted to create a bit more distance between them than he was assuming there to be.

Henry fingered his spoon nervously. "I mean the way we see the world completely through the eyes of Stiva, although he is a character whom Tolstoy does not like."

Elizabeth noticed that Henry was nervous, and she felt a little better disposed towards him because of it. "I agree," she said, "those opening scenes are very well done. I felt I liked Stiva, though he doesn't see the ugliness of what he's done."

Elizabeth's response put Henry more at his ease. "I think it's *because* he doesn't see the ugliness of what he's done, that one can like him. One sees how he honestly and naturally sees the world, so one inevitably feels some sympathy for him."

"That seems true," she said, nodding slowly.

"It's connected to something I've thought about," Henry said. "Can anyone ever be blamed for something he does? If, in the midst of committing adultery in a particularly obvious and tasteless way, someone can appear as sympathetic when seen through his own eyes as Stiva does, can one blame him?"

"I'm not sure I know what you mean by blame. I felt that the way he sees the world shows something missing in him, an absence of delicacy."

"I agree, but to say that there's something missing in him is not to say that it's his fault."

Elizabeth thought for a moment. “That seems true. But the way Stiva is means that he does things which are coarse and harmful.”

“But are they harmful for him?”

“That’s a good question,” she replied.

“One could say that Stiva knew better, that a voice in him told him he should not commit adultery, especially not with the family’s governess. But evidently that voice was just a kind of abstraction, since, as you say, he lacked the delicacy to appreciate what lay behind it. So there simply was not much at stake for him, for which one can fault him, but not really blame him.”

“Yes, I think that makes sense,” Elizabeth said slowly.

“Or take the classic example. In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov finds that he can’t bear having committed these murders. Some powerful voice in him ‘knew better,’ and, though it could not stop him before the fact, afterwards it drives him to confess. But does that mean it’s right?”

“Right in what way?” she asked.

“That these murders were a crime, something wrong, something for which he must pay.”

“So you mean that murder isn’t a crime?”

“Well, that there is no such thing, except legally. Obviously Raskolnikov does have to pay, he can’t live with what he’s done until he confesses. But that’s only because this peculiar voice or instinct is so powerful in him.”

“Hmm,” was Elizabeth’s reply, as she tried to digest what Henry was saying.

“Can one blame someone for doing what he honestly thinks will be good for him, even if a voice in him tells him he shouldn’t?”

“You seem to have given this some thought,” Elizabeth said after a moment, “but I’m not sure what you mean about Raskolnikov. I don’t feel that I understand him very well, but I think that he oversteps a boundary which he himself cannot bear having overstepped.”

“Yes, you put that well, better than I did.”

“But then he’s not right to do what he does,” Elizabeth said tentatively.

“It certainly is a mistake for him. A mistake because he’ll inevitably feel it burning in his conscience as a crime; but that doesn’t mean it *is* a crime.”

“That sounds rational, but I’m not sure it matters all that much.”

“How do you mean?”

Elizabeth paused to collect her thoughts. “If someone can’t bear doing such things, then he is wrong, in a sense, to do them.”

“That’s certainly true. Wrong in being mistaken, in not knowing himself.”

“But does anything else really matter? He should, if he can, let himself be guided by his strongest feelings.”

“Yes, certainly,” Henry replied. “But it might still be worthwhile for someone to gain clarity about what he thinks, even if he can’t be fully guided by it.”

“But then it’s just intellectual.”

“I think not. About murder maybe it is. But I think it makes a difference whether one approaches life intending to judge oneself morally, or intending to pursue as freely as one can what excites one.”

Henry continued to expound his doctrine, which Elizabeth found interesting, though she felt no need to form a definite opinion about it. When dinner arrived, the conversation turned to more concrete matters—where they had grown up, their families, etc.

“I don’t think I quite said what impressed me about *Anna Karenina*,” Henry said after they had finished eating. “I think it’s rare for an author to portray so fully a character who is so unlike himself, and whom he evidently does not like.”

“What other authors are you thinking of?”

“Anyone, really,” he said. “Jane Austen, for instance, can’t bring herself to show the world through the eyes of Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.”

“I’m not sure she would want to.”



Henry thought for a moment. “Probably not, but that has a cost. One doesn’t feel how the world really looks to Mrs. Bennet, how she sees others and herself. I guess one doesn’t feel what it is that she is, if that makes any sense.”

“Yes, it does,” Elizabeth said, smiling in spite of herself. Henry’s determination to say what he meant despite inelegance of language had a certain charm.

Henry smiled in turn. “I guess I mean that what someone is, is largely, or maybe primarily, constituted by the way the world looks to him, including the way he looks to himself. Because this isn’t really shown, Mrs. Bennet ends up seeming two-dimensional, even caricatured.”

“I think you’re right,” Elizabeth replied, “but the book would be less funny if it gave a fuller portrayal of Mrs. Bennet.”

“That’s true. Tolstoy’s method is not exactly hilarious.”

Elizabeth again smiled, at the thought of Tolstoy being hilarious. “I prefer him nonetheless,” she said. “Though I’m not sure I’d want to see more of Mrs. Bennet, Jane Austen has never been a great favorite of mine.”

“Really? I like her a lot. I feel that I learn from her.”

“How so?”

“Well, take Darcy for instance,” Henry said. “I think he illustrates vices that I have as well.”

“You said that nothing is worthy of blame. But there are still vices.”

“Yes, I’m afraid so,” Henry said. “I feel like a professor expounding his system.”

“Well, why don’t you expound it to me?”

“Darcy makes himself ridiculous by overestimating the significance of his title, but that’s nothing for which he is to be blamed; he doesn’t *choose* to see things incorrectly.”

“So you see yourself resembling him?”

“In some respects, though, alas, I don’t have a great estate. I think there are characters in literature more similar to me, but Jane Austen is willing to be edifying: She points out a character

flaw, and indicates how someone might go about correcting or mitigating it.”

“I guess that’s true,” Elizabeth replied. “Some of Trollope’s novels also have an edifying tendency, but in a way that appeals to me more.”

“I haven’t read him.”

“I find Jane Austen a bit cold,” Elizabeth said. “I guess I feel that if she were pointing out a character flaw of mine, I would not really want to try to correct it. I wouldn’t feel that she had given me a reason to do so.”

“How do you mean?”

“I don’t feel while reading her that I would like to live in her world. I’ve only read *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, but the happy endings her heroines find do not feel like happiness for me.”

Henry considered this. “Why not?”

“Well, the lovers at the end remain separate from each other.”

“Yes, I think I know what you mean,” Henry said. “But please go ahead.”

Elizabeth felt uneasy at the prospect of talking about love with a man she did not know well, and whom she felt that she could not love; but she was curious to know what Henry meant by saying that he knew what she meant. “I would want a love that was less constrained, closer, and more removed from others,” she said, then quickly added, “It’s not that I dislike Jane Austen. She’s obviously very intelligent. I just don’t feel great warmth towards her.”

Henry sat considering what Elizabeth had said about love, wondering if what she described was what he too hoped for. He had to say something, but he could not bring up a delicate subject from which she had retreated. “I found the heroine in *Persuasion* warmer than those in Jane Austen’s other novels.” While saying this he saw a way in which he could, without gross indelicacy, revive the subject closer to his heart. “Her name is Anne Elliott; she is gentle, and rather melancholy. She is the woman I have found most moving in literature, the woman I most felt was someone I could be happy with.”

Elizabeth lowered her glance while Henry was speaking, and did not know how to

respond. Though she was curious about what he was saying, she did not want to encourage this line of conversation, which seemed, if she took part in it, bound to give a false impression of her interest in him.

“But even with her I might not be happy,” Henry continued after a moment, feeling as he looked at Elizabeth looking down at the table that he suddenly saw limitations in Anne Elliott he had not seen before; and then feeling, tentatively at first but then more firmly, that this *right now* was *the moment*, the decisive moment: that there had suddenly arisen in his path a chance to open up and show himself, as he had never shown himself to anyone before, he himself as he really was in his heart.

“In spite of Anne Elliott’s melancholy, she’s too inclined towards an ordinary life to be quite right for me, too calm, even too cheerful.” He paused again; Elizabeth continued looking at her plate. Henry felt that she meant to indicate discomfort with this conversation, but this caused him to move with preternatural calm and certainty in a still more personal direction. “If her melancholy made her more desperate, or made her feel more distant in some way,” he said, speaking every word very distinctly, slowing down at the word “distant,” “then I might feel that she is someone I could understand, someone my heart could understand, and feel at home with.”

Still Elizabeth looked down, but Henry could see that she was blushing, which confirmed his boldness. “A woman I could love and feel at home with would not be so calm and prudent; her feelings would not *allow* her to. She would look at other people and feel only distance, only perplexity at what makes them act as they do, even what makes them enjoy each other’s company.”

Henry had never before clearly thought all of this; he was trying to describe how it seemed to him at the moment that the world looked through the eyes of Elizabeth. Yet he also felt he was unfolding something deep inside himself. “A woman I could love would not have the contentment of a Jane Austen character, a contentment which comes from feeling some connection to family and friends. She would face the grim prospect of spending her whole life essentially alone, unconnected, the prospect of never finding anyone with whom she could feel

real sympathy, or any sort of basic similarity.”

He paused again, thinking and hoping that perhaps now Elizabeth would respond; but after a moment he continued. “She would long, as I do, for something deep and solid, yet tender and warm. She would want to find a man whose feelings and thoughts are rich and private, and are his, not an imitation of what others are, or of what he’s been told he should be. A man who reacts to her as her, who sees and feels what she is. The world would not matter: There would be no rules, no assumptions of what is and is not done.” He paused. “There would be especially no assumption of quick intimacy, no casualness, let alone looseness, but if anything the opposite, delicacy, perhaps shyness.”

Again he paused, and again there was no response. “And she would want to share with me, as I would with her, a tenderness and, well, pity towards each other for the pain of all those years when each of us was alone, outside the rest of our species, inexplicably surrounded by people whose passions were so different from ours.” Another moment’s pause, and still no response. “Perhaps she would remain melancholy; perhaps there would be scars I could not heal; for me that too would be sweet, even especially sweet, as long as I brought something pleasant to her life.”

He paused again. He had said what he had to say, and had begun to say less urgent things. To continue now without her having responded would detract from the seriousness of what he had said; so he waited.

Elizabeth’s heart was pounding. It did not make sense to her; how could *he* be saying these words, *he* who seemed so cool and calm? How could *he* have such feelings? How could it be *he* saying this and not the other? How long she had awaited such words from the other! How could *he* have known so quickly how to say them? How could the other, so alone and bitter, never have said nearly so much to her in all the time they had known each other, despite her attempts to reach him? How could it be that instead *he* was now saying these words to her, he who seemed so calm, so sure, so fluent?

And yet maybe the words were a fluke, she told herself. But how could that be? Maybe

they were a lucky guess on the part of someone eager to please. Or maybe this forceful and intelligent young man in front of her was a sort of seducer; yes, that seemed likely, that seemed probable. But still he knew her, he knew what she was like, he saw her; could he really be an enemy in her eyes?

Slowly she lifted her head and looked at him, her eyes wide open, her expression blank. For a moment she wanted to ask if he meant these words he spoke; but did it really matter? Did it matter enough to ask it at this moment? Didn't she want to be close to him even if he weren't sincere? How could she want to resist him for the barren solitude he had described so well?

Henry expected that Elizabeth might be angry with him, though he thought he had made an impression which would grow in time. Still feeling peculiarly certain of what to do, he felt that he must let the subject drop, but he checked the temptation to smile complaisantly. "I'm sorry if what I said made you uncomfortable, but I felt I had to say it."

She continued looking at him, feeling alternately hope and pain at the thought of giving herself to a seducer who seemed to understand her. Did he understand her? That was the question. Was he really at all like her? Was he perhaps in truth unhappy in the midst of his conquests? That was very important for her to know. If he were unhappy, then he might, no, he must, genuinely understand something about her; then she could really give herself to him.

Henry's certainty began to ebb as no anger, or any other emotion, appeared on Elizabeth's face. "My reaction to you has been so unlike anything I've experienced before in my life, and somehow I wanted you to know that, I wanted you to know it at that moment."

She continued thinking, but if he weren't even unhappy, would there be any real connection between them? Could he understand her at all, except in some strange and cold intellectual way? Would it be any better being with him than with the men she had known other than Edward? Perhaps in that case she could and would want no more than to be friends with him. Which probably would not interest him, so in that case she would have to return to her solitude, a prospect which suddenly felt surprisingly painful after a few moments spent expecting to escape it.

But maybe he is unhappy, she thought, maybe it's not all a lie. She considered asking him simply that, if he were truly unhappy.

As Elizabeth sat staring blankly at him, Henry began to wonder if perhaps he had misread her. Perhaps she simply had nothing to say in response to what he had said. He could not quite believe this, but clearly he must let the subject drop. "I've been so unhappy," he said.

Elizabeth was taken aback that Henry had answered her unspoken question. How could he have known what was on her mind? Was this still more evidence of his seductive powers? Even claiming unhappiness was a tool for him! But maybe he was sincere, maybe he really was unhappy. But even if he was unhappy, did he tell her so because he truly felt that way at the moment, or simply because he knew that it was what she hoped to hear? Was he someone she could love, seducer or not, or was he some sort of terrifying, even demonic, man or thing?

Elizabeth's momentary look of distrust gave the *coup de grace* to Henry's waning confidence. "She doesn't like me," he thought with horror, as a sharp pain suddenly stabbed his heart. He had shown himself so intimately, so hopefully, only to be disliked. He wondered with astonishment how she could react to him this way; yet at the same time he was pierced by the thought that he should have known this was coming, that deep down it was what he had expected. Hadn't the hope that she would like him been a flimsy, absurd attempt to escape, to deny what he really was? Hadn't he known that others would recoil from him with disgust, that he was in some deep way a rotten thing?

He sat staring blindly at the tablecloth, conscious of Elizabeth's presence, of her viewing him with distaste. He wished that he could escape her presence, if only to dislike himself more calmly by himself.

Yet what was happening still felt insubstantial. It had been not only his hope but his belief that here was a strange and wonderful girl who might love him. Even if she could not love him, even if there was something terribly wrong with him, could he have been completely mistaken about her? Could he have imagined her unhappiness?

Meanwhile, torn between hope and suspicion, even terror, Elizabeth felt she must say

something to Henry, for what if he were sincere, if only about being unhappy, and he truly did not know the impression he had made on her?

Henry felt he had to pull himself together, at least for the moment. "I'm sorry, I guess I misinterpreted you in a way which must seem altogether absurd." He heard his voice as if it were several feet away from him. "I guess it's time for me to get the check."

Again Elizabeth was a bit taken aback at Henry's saying something close to what had been on her mind. Either he was demonic indeed, or he was, well, something else, she wasn't sure what, but something to which she must respond. "Are you really as unhappy as you look?"

He looked up at her and smiled sadly; he felt it would be sweet to be able to cry. "If you want to know, right now I feel pretty awful." But her question had made him feel less so.

"Are you really unhappy in general, as you said?"

"Well, yeah, I keep plugging along, but my life is rather barren."

"I'm sorry if this is a rude question, but were you sincere?"

"What do you mean? When?"

"Everything you said, about yourself, the sort of woman you want, the sort of love you want with her."

Henry wondered what was going through her mind. "Elizabeth, I was more sincere than I've ever been in my life, even to myself."

She looked down. After a moment, she responded. "I'm sorry, I doubted you, and I still don't feel sure. Somehow you're not the sort of man I thought would feel those things. But what you said, I've waited so long to hear." She looked up at him. "Whatever happens, it's very special for me to be sitting here right now with someone who could say those things to me."

It took Henry a moment to trust his ears and eyes. He then felt amazed at the sweetness of Elizabeth's words, though he doubted that she meant them. And what she was saying was unclear: Did she want to be his friend or not? "I don't quite know what to say," he said slowly. "A minute ago you looked like you disliked me."

"I did? I'm sorry, I can see why it might have seemed so." She smiled sadly. "What you

said was, well, so perfect, I didn't quite trust it could be sincere."

"Not sincere?" Henry asked quietly, looking down.

"You seem so different from what I would have expected, you seem so calm and comfortable."

"I do?"

"Not right now, of course, but you often seem as if you know exactly what to say. It made me wonder if you could mean what you were saying."

"Why would I say something if I didn't mean it?"

"I don't know, but I don't feel I can gauge what you are by what I can understand."

Henry considered this for a moment. "I feel almost the opposite of calm and comfortable."

"How so?"

"I feel, I don't know, scared sometimes, insubstantial, weak. Like I might go insane if I can't be close to someone."

"I feel that way sometimes."

He smiled at her, then looked down again. "Sometimes I feel pain, stabbing pain. I feel wretched, loathsome."

"What do you mean?"

"I feel like there's something wrong with me," he said. "Like I'm a kind of criminal somehow."

Elizabeth did not know how to respond. "I'm listening," she said after a moment.

"I feel like I'm unspeakably horrible, low, base. Nothing seems to express it properly. Somehow I'm simply wrong, period."

"Is there something in particular you feel is wrong?"

"I don't know." He looked up at Elizabeth, and felt almost blinded by the proximity of her golden hair, and her look of attention and concern. "God, you are so beautiful," he said, to her surprise. He lowered his glance as he continued, "I feel there is something wrong with me



that you must not be seeing, that I felt you were seeing when you seemed to dislike me a minute ago.”

“How do you mean?”

“It feels like it can’t be *me* whom you like,” he said quickly, “it must be unreal somehow, or you must be making a mistake.” After a pause, he added, “It’s not that this feeling is necessarily rational.”

“What is it that you feel might be wrong?”

“Maybe I’m too low for you, or too, too intense or something, not healthy or calm, not serious enough, I hardly know, but I feel there must be *something* you’re overlooking. And I don’t honestly feel *sure* that this feeling is unrealistic.”

Elizabeth smiled at the thought of Henry not being serious enough for her. She considered what he had been saying, and thought of his peculiar remark about her beauty. She often felt revulsion when men told her she was attractive, while Edward’s frequent compliments struck her as mere politeness. Henry’s odd remark, by contrast, seemed simply a statement of his feeling or opinion. She wondered if he really did find her beautiful, what it might mean for him to feel that while looking at her. This thought was pleasing to her, more than she would have guessed it could be. However, it had one drawback: It might create a distance between them.

“Perhaps you overestimate me,” she said.

Henry smiled, still feeling too timid to look up. “Maybe, but I don’t really think so. You are, or you seem, well, divine to me.” His choice of this word surprised Henry, but it felt appropriate.

“Divine?” The word struck Elizabeth differently; her doubt of his sincerity reemerged.

“I guess it sounds absurd, but that’s what I feel. It doesn’t really seem absurd to me.”

“I’m sorry, I feel scared when you say that,” Elizabeth said quickly. “How could it be that I seem that way to you?”

“I don’t know,” Henry said. He looked up at her, and her beauty again struck him,

almost blinded him. “You’re so beautiful, and so elegant, so graceful, so intelligent.” He lowered his glance. “Of course I don’t mean that I think you’re a goddess, but you just seem to me, well, perfect, far above me.”

“Do you see that to me you are an intelligent and forceful man?” she asked quickly.

He wondered how he had displeased her. “I see that I might seem that way.” After a pause, he added, “I upset you by saying that you seem divine.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“It’s hard for me to see how you could really feel that,” she said.

He smiled. “I don’t quite know how to explain it to you, though it doesn’t seem strange to me.” He looked down. “If my feelings are too strange for you, I’d understand that.”

“That’s not what I feel, Henry. I don’t mind strangeness at all; I just didn’t see how you could have meant what you said.”

Henry’s tendency was to expect either contempt or sympathy from Elizabeth, and he felt nonplussed by her distrust, even slightly irritated. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what to say. To describe my feeling now, it would feel like I was trying to prove I had been sincere.”

Elizabeth looked down. “The way I’m being must be very irritating,” she said sadly.

“I wouldn’t say that. I guess I just don’t quite understand what you’re feeling.” He looked at her and smiled. “Should we go? We could get a cup of coffee or ice cream somewhere.”

“Yes, let’s go.”

Rather than call for the waiter, Henry continued looking Elizabeth. She seemed so beautiful to him, so fine, so free of any hint of crudeness or affectation. He looked at her for half a minute, and then lowered his glance, so that for a moment they were both looking down.

“You don’t mind so much the stupid things I say?” he asked.

Elizabeth felt almost like crying. “Not at all, Henry,” she said. “I’m sorry I react this way.” She looked up at him, and noticed for the first time the beauty of his black hair and thin,

pale face. “Being with you this evening has been so special for me.”

Henry felt delighted at this. Slowly, very slowly, very tentatively, wanting her to see how tentative the movement was, he moved his hand towards her, and touched, not her hand but only her wrist, as it lay on the table. He touched it with his fingertips, stroked it very slowly, feeling as he did that he was touching something precious and rare; and then he slowly withdrew his hand, and timidly looked up at her and smiled at her, a slight and uncertain smile, a smile that asked if she could like him.

Henry’s gesture surprised Elizabeth. Here was this forceful man who had sought her out, touching her so timidly, so gently. She did not understand him, she could not put the pieces together, but perhaps he meant what he said, perhaps his words and his gestures were sincere, perhaps he really was unhappy, perhaps he even really longed to be close to her. What would it mean to be close to him? It seemed a strange and frightening prospect, but maybe a wonderful one as well.

As he smiled his timid smile at her, she smiled a timid smile back at him.

Henry felt he had found an angel and entered heaven.

Elizabeth didn’t know whether the man facing her was an angel or a devil, or some mixture of the two; but whatever he was, she was glad for the change he had suddenly wrought in her life.

## CHAPTER TWO

Elizabeth and Henry had nothing better to do in the days that followed than spend their time together.

The sight of Elizabeth's golden hair, her tall and feminine form, her unhurried and graceful movements, sometimes made Henry feel immature, awkward, even as if he were perpetrating a kind of fraud. He wasn't sure what to make of these feelings. On the one hand, they seemed absurd; on the other, might they not reveal that he genuinely wasn't good enough for her? At least Elizabeth might interpret them that way—he didn't really think she would, but he wasn't sure. However, the feeling of being a fraud fed on his attempt to keep it to himself, so he felt he had no choice but to tell her what he was feeling.

Elizabeth was intrigued as well as flattered by what Henry eventually said. She found his feelings peculiarly strong and inward; she had never imagined someone feeling quite this way.

For Henry her warm response was heavenly. He went on to describe how he found himself weak and gravely flawed. Or did he still see himself that way? Could he be telling her of the harshness with which he judged himself if that harshness had not become questionable? The world looked different with Elizabeth in it.

Henry felt himself opening up in some way; he felt the beginning of a new happiness whose eventual form he could not yet anticipate.

Yet he was afraid of each revelation he made, not quite able to believe that she would react positively. How could she not recoil from his strange and ridiculous feelings? How could she not find him unstable, unhealthy, even loathsome? But acute and painful doubts repeatedly gave way to a flood of delight as he found that she simply didn't feel what he feared she would.

He told her of how, as a boy of five, he had dreamed of finding a "princess" who would be warm, private, and vaguely ethereal. Now she was his princess, even that very princess; he was

still, or again, that boy.

He talked of his childhood, of how the boys he knew had hated him, of how his mother had assumed that his unpopularity was due to his own timidity. He felt mortified for his mother as he described this, something it had never occurred to him to feel until he thought of how she might look through Elizabeth's eyes.

Elizabeth would watch Henry tell her things which he evidently felt, and almost thought, were bound to disgust her. His speech would slow down as he forced the words out. At such times her heart felt as if it were moving out towards him.

At other times Henry's lightness charmed her. When in a good mood he bounced around the room, or curled up in a ball near her and put his head on her lap. If she smiled at some bizarre refinement of his self-loathing, he smiled back. He wanted attention, not reverence.

Henry seemed to understand something of her feeling of distance from others, yet he did not feel the same way himself. This combination was a bit surprising to Elizabeth. Henry shared her feeling that the lives of most people were strangely pointless; yet to a great extent he approached others as potential judges, or spectators, or rivals, all of which she found alien.

He talked only occasionally, in passing, of things he found beautiful; except for female beauty, it did not seem to be a terribly important experience for him. He talked even less of his ambition, but here Elizabeth sensed that he was keeping something to himself. Ambition revealed itself in his severe judgments of others, in the definiteness with which he occasionally spoke about politics, and in his very criticisms of himself, which were, she sensed, connected to a great pride.

During their first weeks together, Henry did most of the talking, gripped as he was by doubts and fears. In time, however, he began to relax, and conversation became more mutual. Elizabeth talked of her solitary past, of her faith and its waning, and of course of her music, to which Henry was eager to be introduced.

Henry came to feel as if he had entered a world which had been designed in every particular to be delightful to him personally. What was happening did not seem altogether real, but he was glad to give himself to it.

Yet he soon felt that something was incomplete. There were occasions when he had to hold himself back, physically and somehow not just physically. He was slightly ashamed of wanting this final intimacy; he had so much already. He was reluctant to talk about it with Elizabeth, for fear of pressuring her, but it seemed absurd to allow remaining silent about his desire to make him less natural around her.

Elizabeth certainly did not find his desire dirty. The thought of removing the last barrier that separated her from Henry was a bit frightening for her, but she wanted their love to flourish and grow.

Henry was so warm, so shy and honest and unmechanical, that the experience for Elizabeth was a delight beyond her expectation. Henry was precious in his gentleness and warmth, thinness and pallor, shyness and sweetness and awkwardness and honesty. When he was inside of her, he seemed so moved; she had not imagined inspiring such a passion.

She felt too happy for the happiness not to be tinged with sadness. Could such happiness be real? Would it last? It would of course end eventually, in death, but could it really last until then?

For Henry what was happening was simply too good to be true; he could not believe it, but he told her how he felt: he could share everything with this girl who was so beautiful, so moving, and who loved him, to his ever-recurring disbelief. Once they were making love he was astonished at the feeling that welled up within him; he felt a pleasure that was almost painful, so powerful was his reaction to her beauty, her purity and fineness, her being. He felt that he had simply never known before this moment what life was.

## CHAPTER THREE

Henry arranged to take Elizabeth to dinner at *Chez Pierre* three months after their first date there.

As he walked to her room, again wearing his suit, again carrying a dozen roses, he thought of the earlier occasion. “How uncertain it seemed that she would even like me,” he recalled. “I didn’t really conceive of the possibility of being myself with her.”

He suddenly thought of something in the present, a vague feeling of irritation with Elizabeth which had recently come over him at times. Initially he had been amazed at the emergence of this feeling; he could not account for it, and he did not want to try. But now he could not get it out of his mind.

Once he arrived at Elizabeth’s, his thoughts turned increasingly inward. Suddenly he had to hide something from her. He heard himself ask predictable questions, and make a strained witticism. Suddenly he was pretending to feel natural and tender, as he truly had felt weeks or days or even hours earlier.

How could this be happening? What could make this feeling disappear? He felt as if he were sinking.

As they left for the restaurant, thoughts were racing through his head, and his voice sounded as if it were ten feet away from him.

Anything would be better than this. He let the conversation languish, and they walked in silence.

“Are you thinking about something?” she asked.

“Yes, I am.”

“Would you like to talk about it?”

“Talk about it? I don’t know if that would be a good idea.”

Elizabeth did not want to force a confidence. She silently took Henry's arm.

Once they had reached the restaurant and ordered dinner, Henry said, "There's something I have to talk about, though I would avoid it if I felt I could."

Elizabeth looked at him.

"I think I'm a kind of monster." As he said this the sinking feeling began to recede.

"How so?"

"I know I've used that word to describe myself before, but this is something much worse."

"I'm listening."

"I'm a kind of monster," he repeated, but the repetition made it seem he wasn't really saying what he felt, and the sinking feeling began to reemerge. "You see, I have this terrible thing to tell you, I know not even exactly what, but I know it's terrible." He paused. "I love you so, and you are so wonderful, and you've been so wonderful to me."

Suddenly Elizabeth's heart was pounding. Could he want to end things between them?

Henry found it hard to continue, but he saw that he was causing Elizabeth pain. "I don't know why, but I feel a kind of distance at times."

"Distance?"

"Distance, yes."

Several seconds passed slowly.

"What sort of distance?" Elizabeth asked quietly.

"I'm not sure," Henry replied. "I guess I mean that at times I feel uncomfortable with the degree of closeness between us."

"You don't want to be close?"

"No, I don't mean that, I don't mean anything like that." He paused, suddenly unsure that he didn't mean something like that; nothing was definite at the moment. "It makes me uneasy to feel so closely bound together. It seems monstrous to me that I feel this way, and I don't expect you to accept it. But I felt like a fraud trying to keep it to myself, I couldn't keep it to myself." As he stopped talking, a stab of pain shot through him. "When I have driven her away, how will I



ever be close to anyone?" he wondered.

Elizabeth saw that he was unhappy, and touched his hand for a moment.

"I'm such a monster," he said. "Maybe you shouldn't touch me."

"I love you, whatever happens between us."

Hope dawned for Henry. "How can you love me while I'm saying these horrible things?"

"I don't think you could say something that would change that," she replied. "But you should ask how I can love you while you're *not* saying these horrible things."

He smiled. "I should get to the point, but I hardly know what it is. I think all I mean is that I want to be myself. I sometimes feel pressure to be warm or sweet in a certain way."

"Do you think I expect that of you?"

"No, I guess not. Yet I feel there are boundaries which I shouldn't cross."

"Like what?" she asked.

"I hardly know. I couldn't bring myself to be rude to you, which is a bad example, since I wouldn't want to be rude to you. I couldn't bring myself to be cool, to let myself feel distant for a few hours."

"Which you would like to do?"

"Well, I'm not sure I wouldn't occasionally." He sighed. "I feel so horrible while saying all this. There is no need for you to tolerate it if you don't want to."

"What you're saying is not so bad."

"It seems horrible to me."

"Why?" she asked.

"That I might sometimes want to be cool to you, you who are so wonderful."

"I wouldn't be very wonderful if I couldn't tolerate occasional coolness."

"That makes sense," he said. "Yet it seems horrible that you should have to tolerate it from *me*."

She smiled. "Now that sounds like the Henry Larson I know."

"Who is a ridiculous human being," he said.

“But charming.”

After several seconds, Elizabeth asked, “Was there more?”

“I don’t think so,” Henry said. “I was just thinking of something. How I used to walk with my dog through a group of warehouses a few blocks from our house. I would walk around, looking at things, sometimes trying to figure out what was in the warehouses.” He paused. “My life was sort of dingy then. I thought it would get better, but I didn’t imagine being close to somebody like you.”

“I wish we had known each other then,” she said.

“You do? Do you think you would have liked me?”

“Yes, I do. The people I knew when I was a child all had definite ideas of what to do, but to me their lives seemed so drab.”

“You were looking for someone moved by beauty,” Henry said, “not someone walking around warehouses.”

“I didn’t really know what I was looking for. It wasn’t until I was 10 or 11 that I began to think of beauty as the thing that counted.”

“Really?”

“I knew that I loved a certain kind of music. I wanted to be as close to it as I could. But at first I didn’t think of it in more general terms than that.” She smiled. “I even remember being suspicious of the word beauty. My mother would say that some building was beautiful, or that it was beautiful the way people worked together to clean up the park, and I would think, that word has nothing to do with my music.”

“How did that change?”

She thought for a moment. “In part it was as I got to know a number of pieces of music. Some pieces, and some sections, seemed more, well, beautiful than others. At first it had all been a mass that was so different from anything else I had encountered, no word seemed to fit.

“I remember being in a bookstore once and looking at a book of prints of Renaissance paintings,” she continued. “I was struck by some of the paintings of the Virgin Mary. Though

my reaction wasn't as strong as to music, it seemed like a similar kind of feeling, which surprised me. I was used to having that feeling only in response to music."

"How old were you?"

"11 or 12, I think."

"That's interesting," Henry said. "For me, greatness as a category was somehow already present when I was six years old."

"Do you think it was something you were born with?"

"I don't think I felt it before then, but that doesn't mean it wasn't there, ready to be activated. Of course one could say that about a lot of things, certainly about your feeling for beauty. But it required very little for me to form the idea that there was such a thing as greatness, and then I immediately felt that it was *the* thing that could really make life something."

"When you describe greatness," Elizabeth said after a moment, "it doesn't move me, but I can imagine that someone might feel differently. It does seem big, and sort of exciting. With many people, it baffles me that they can find the energy to do what they are doing."

"Maybe you and I are just more lazy than they are."

"I think that's true of me," Elizabeth replied. "I think that laziness is part of my attraction to beauty."

"Really? How so?"

"It seems rare that anything makes a big impression on busy people. And beauty is so removed from practical things. I think a person might need to feel at loose ends in order to be open to it." She paused. "But Bach worked most of the time, so that must not be what matters most. What do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know." After a few seconds he added, "So while I walked around those warehouses I was really an inarticulate poet, a kind of Schiller of Stamford?"

"Inarticulate is not the term for you."

Later that evening Henry and Elizabeth sat on a bench facing the Charles River. It was a warm, clear April night.

"I'm afraid that what I said earlier seems incomplete," Henry said. "I feel like you think I'm a much nicer guy than I am."

Elizabeth smiled. "Oh, I do?"

"I haven't told you that for me everything else has been second to my ambition."

"Even love?"

"I guess that was my revelation of the moment. That doesn't bother you?"

Elizabeth thought for a moment. "I wouldn't quite say that. But you are what you are."

"So it does bother you?"

"We're headed more in different directions than I might have dreamed of," she said. "But one doesn't get exactly what one dreams of. And I don't know if one would one even want to."

"I never thought of that. Why not?"

"Real life brings one another person--if one is fortunate. One's dreams are so pale by comparison."

Henry pondered this for a moment. It made a certain sense, yet he wasn't sure what he thought about it. Meanwhile, he still felt restless. "There is also the character of my ambition," he said. "I hope to do good, of course, but what I chiefly want is to be great, to stand far above others—and I *like* being that way."

"I realize that."

"That doesn't bother you?"

"Perhaps it makes me a little uneasy," she said after a moment. "However, I feel less kinship with people who talk about wanting to do good. And your ambition is interesting."

"So it makes you uneasy?"

"Yes, the sense that what you really want is to be above others, perhaps including me."

"I don't really think of you from that point of view."

They sat in silence for a moment. "Shall we go home?" Elizabeth asked.

“I guess I feel inclined to put some kind of distance between us tonight,” he said.

“We don’t have to spend the rest of the evening together.”

“Oddly enough, I don’t really feel like being by myself, though I would understand if you did. I feel like being with you but having something unpleasant happen. Pretty unappealing, huh?”

“Unpleasant in what way?” she asked.

“I don’t know, something that makes things less nice. Less warm, less friendly. God, this sounds so rotten.” He smiled. “I guess you can’t feel for me as I feel *this* feeling.”

“I’m not sure I understand it.”

“I’m sure I don’t either, but there it is. If this is too much for you to tolerate, I’d understand.”

She smiled. “You certainly are trying to get rid of me.”

“Not at all. I keep being pleasantly surprised that I haven’t.”

Elizabeth lay awake in bed that night, listening to Henry breathe as he fell asleep. She wondered if the evening just passed was a harbinger of things to come.

The next day Henry was warm and playful. He apologized several times for the strange mood he had been in, though Elizabeth told him there was no need to apologize.

On the following day, however, he was less talkative. Soon he again wanted to describe feelings of distance--in greater detail, and with more relish.

He said with an apologetic smile that he was “the one with the problem,” and speculated that his feelings were prompted by expectations of what Elizabeth would expect of him. However, he seemed to feel less remorse than he had initially.

Days and weeks followed in which Henry’s feelings of distance and hostility were the most frequent subject of conversation between them. Elizabeth began to feel pain mingled with pleasure at the sight of him: She never knew when the next attack was coming.

Earlier she had imagined being married to Henry. However, he was so young, a mere 19. Might marriage not hold him back as he faced the world he hoped to conquer? And would he remain happy with a woman two years older than he? There was also a feeling of insubstantiality that came from knowing that his parents were divorced, and that he barely knew his father.

In retrospect, however, these worries seemed strangely enviable.

Henry, on the other hand, felt he was learning all over again that Elizabeth loved him as he really was.

Or was it love that she felt? It began to seem somehow that she was following his lead, or that she was dominated by him. Obviously that wasn't wholly true. She often disagreed with things he said; but the feeling that she was following his lead lingered.

Absurd though it was, Henry often felt that there was something critical he had to say about her. It was usually tentative, a suggestion: Didn't she think this or that might be true of her?

He allowed himself to wonder if what she took to be her love of beauty really was that. This had always been mysterious to him, and he felt a certain awe of it. As he thought about it now, however, love of beauty seemed possibly too high, too insubstantial, too selfless, to grip a person as nothing else did. Yet that one should *think* it did, *that* was comprehensible. Might Elizabeth not be driven by a hidden pride? Might she not be drawn to seeing herself and her life as high, fine, removed from a world at once uninterested and uninteresting? Might she misinterpret a genuine inclination towards beauty as the strongest thing in her? Though Henry didn't think this explanation was necessarily true, it did make sense to him.

Of course it was absurd as well as rude to doubt that someone so intelligent as Elizabeth was what she thought herself to be. On the other hand, how could he *know* what she was if he didn't understand it? Wasn't it only natural to be uncertain?

Most people, however unattractive, *did* make sense to Henry. He was rather proud of his ability to put himself inside another's head and imagine what it was like to be there. Why

couldn't he do this with Elizabeth? Or rather, why couldn't he do it with this particular characteristic--for he saw some things about her more clearly. Perhaps her love of beauty was more complicated or deep; but perhaps the difference was somewhere else. Perhaps he was wary of seeing her in a way that she would find unflattering, and that might therefore put a distance, even a fatal distance, between them. Perhaps he had given himself blinders, at least to shield out certain questions; in which case he was eager to remove them.

Of course not flattering was one thing, and poking at the heart of her character was another. And this was by no means the harshest aspect of the way he now behaved. He often felt as if he wanted to break something between them, to make things somehow unsettled, unsweet, unfriendly, uncivilized, nasty, hostile. Not necessarily permanently, but not necessarily temporarily either! He wanted things harsher, more at odds, less harmonious, less together. And these feelings as well he described to her, eventually even showed her. He was never angry, but he was often cold; and dissecting her character, seeking out unflattering aspects, looking at them in every possible light, thoroughly, accurately, dispassionately--this seemed to gratify him as nothing else did.

He knew he was taking a chance, that his freakish behavior might drive her away. But did he have an alternative? Every time he tried to keep something to himself was a fiasco. Moreover, he didn't really think he would lose her, as long as he made it clear that what he was thinking and feeling troubled and shocked him. He did not think that she would soon be unhappy enough to give up on what he had brought to her life.

So he told her what he felt and thought, apologized often, and said he hoped the whole thing would soon pass.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Several days after Henry and Elizabeth's second visit to *Chez Pierre*, Edward Webster called and left a message on Elizabeth's answering machine.

His eagerness to speak with her grew in the days that followed, but he did not call again. He was accustomed with Elizabeth to being the pursued, not the pursuer; and he felt an increasingly bitter curiosity to see how long it would be before she called back.

She left a brief message on his machine several days later. He called back the following morning, at a time when he was pretty sure she would be there.

When Elizabeth heard his voice, she picked up the phone. "Hello, Edward, I'm here." She would have liked to avoid speaking to him, but it seemed ridiculous to hide from someone she knew so well.

"Well, well, there you are, trampling phone machine conventions under foot." He was pleasantly surprised that she had answered. "I hope I didn't disturb your beauty sleep."

"No, I've been awake for a while," she said.

"How are you, my dear?"

"I'm doing well. How are you?"

"Not bad, though it's a sticky morning here in the Big Apple. Speaking of which, I was thinking of making a visit this weekend to Beantown and to my loved ones at dear old Lowell House."

"Would you like to get together while you are here?"

"Actually I was hoping to crash on your couch. My main reason for coming, you see, would be to visit a young lady who was born amidst brotherly love, not that my love for her is exclusively fraternal."

Elizabeth let a moment pass before she responded. "I don't think it would be a good idea



for you to stay here now.”

“You don’t.”

“No, I’m sorry. But I would be glad to see you if you come.”

“No, that won’t be necessary.” He paused. “Well, I guess I’ll go.”

“Okay.”

He couldn’t leave it at that. He called back five minutes later. “Just so I know, is there a particular reason you don’t want me to stay with you?”

“Yes, there is. I’m dating someone.”

“Okay. Well, good bye.”

“Good bye, Edward.”

He hung up the phone. He looked out the window for a minute. Then he picked up the annual report of the lamp company which lay on his desk, but he could not concentrate.

“This is stupid,” he thought. He got up and walked to the window. He looked down at the street, at the people walking along Madison Avenue. “This city is full of idiots,” he said aloud. He walked out of his office, told his secretary he would be back after lunch, and went outside.

The humid April morning hinted at the coming summer. Edward felt hatred for the heat, for New York, for the people he saw, especially the businesswomen in their suits and sneakers and briefcases. “The stupid bitches, playing at being men,” he thought.

When he returned to his office he forced himself to read the report on the lamp manufacturing company.

That afternoon he had a visitor.

“Hi, Dick,” he said as Richard Szabo knocked at his door. “Come on in, don’t hover about. Didn’t your father tell you that a man wins the respect he assumes?”

“No, I don’t think he did.”

“If you had walked right into my office instead of knocking, I’m sure you’d be a managing director by now.”

“I suppose you might be right.”

“Sure, sure I’m right. All you’ve got to do is be a more aggressive son of a bitch than the next guy. But it takes balls to do that, and some of the guys wonder if that’s what you have down there, Dick.” He paused. “No pun intended, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Well, maybe just a little bit. But what can I do for you?”

“I was just stopping by to say hello.”

“Well hello, Dick. Now isn’t that a charming thing for you to do? I’ve always trusted you, Dick, at least as far as I can throw you, which is more than I’d say of some people, so I won’t even consider the possibility that you stopped by because I’m behind schedule with this Northern Lights report, and you maybe wanted to see what was the matter, maybe find a few details which you could maybe mention here and there around the office, maybe help make sure that I’m not raised to managing director before you are, even though I did join the company two years after you.” He paused, but Richard said nothing. “Not that I’d blame you so much if that’s what you were doing; I’m sure it would be awfully embarrassing for you if another younger manager were promoted before you. But, as I say, I won’t even consider that possibility, since you’ve always been straightforward with me, as far as I know.”

“I guess this must be a bad time for me to stop by, since you’re busy with that report,” Richard said, turning towards the door.

“No, no, I was just joking. That report isn’t due until Friday. You know how much I enjoy seeing you, Dick.”

To this Richard had nothing to say.

“So how about if we grab a bite to eat later on?” Edward then asked, to Richard’s surprise.

“If you’d like.”

“Since you’ve been so kind as to pay me this little visit, I’ll stop by your office when I’m

ready to go.”

“Fine.”

Once they had ordered dinner and were sharing a pitcher of beer, Richard said, “You’re not your usual self today.”

“You mean I’m even more of a son of a bitch than usual. Well, I feel like crap.”

“Is anything particular the matter?”

“Yeah, sure, something particular is the matter,” Edward replied, mimicking Richard’s diction. “Something you might not know about, girl trouble.”

“Anyone I know?”

“No, no, not one of the local females. A girl still up at Harvard.” He sipped his beer. “Seems the wench has found another fella.”

“I didn’t know you were seeing anyone.”

“You thought I was one of you people?”

Richard let a moment pass before responding. “It’s hard to imagine you dating someone. One is supposed to provide warmth and light conversation.”

“You old sexist. I always thought you had a thing against women. Besides, I like light conversation as much as the next guy.”

“It doesn’t seem light when you’re in it.”

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe that’s got something to do with this fiasco, what do you think, Dick?”

“Maybe.”

“Would you like to join me on a little scouting mission? I’ve been thinking of heading up to Cambridge to get a glimpse of the local Lothario.”

“Sure, that might be fun. I haven’t been to Harvard since the game my sophomore year of college.” Richard had gone to Yale.

“Great, I can look at the heartthrob for whom I’ve been rejected, and you can look at the university which rejected you. So what does it feel like to have been second best?”

“Probably better than it feels to have been thrown over by your girlfriend.”

“I’m not sure she was my girlfriend. We never ‘did it,’ if you know what I mean, or rather if you understand what I’m saying.”

Richard said nothing.

“But she seemed a bit less of a bitch than other girls I’ve known. Pardon my French; I assume you don’t mind my speaking freely.”

“Not at all.”

Lowell House, with its blue and gold domes reaching to the sky, is the tallest of Harvard’s 12 undergraduate Houses. When Edward and Richard reached Cambridge the following Saturday afternoon, Edward pointed to the Lowell House tower and said, “What we want to do is go up there, so we can look around without being noticed.”

“You don’t think your disguise will prevent your being recognized?” Richard asked. Edward had on sunglasses and a surprisingly convincing false beard. He was uncharacteristically dressed in blue jeans and a T-shirt.

“Well, hopefully it will, but I don’t want to depend on it for long. I figure we’ll stay in the tower until we see her, with or without her friend, and then follow discreetly, so we can get a good look.”

“On Saturday night they’re likely to go out.”

“That’s what I figured.”

As they were walking towards Lowell House, Richard asked, “In what part of the building does she live?”

“She lives straight ahead past the entrance, near the cafeteria. Assuming she hasn’t moved since October.”

“You haven’t been to her room since October?”

“No.”

“Has she come to New York since then?”

“No. I told you she wasn’t exactly my girlfriend.”

“What was she?”

“Fewer questions, please and more dispatch.” They had almost reached the entrance.

“So how do we get up there?” Richard asked.

“Good question. This glass door is new. I’ll have to talk to the superintendent.”

“He’ll remember you?”

“Sure he’ll remember me. Dick, my friend, in college I was a big man. Then I wouldn’t have spent time with a nonentity like you.”

“So what happened?”

“I’m not sure. You make me less sick to my stomach than the sort of people I used to hang around with. Wait here; this shouldn’t take long.”

The superintendent was glad to let Edward into the tower. Edward introduced Richard as a friend of his who had once been the chief bell-ringer at Yale.

“That way it will make sense our staying up here a while,” Edward explained as they walked up the stairs.

“I figured that, but I’m glad he didn’t ask me any questions about bells.”

“He doesn’t know bells from his anus. All he does is replace lost keys.”

Soon they were were ensconced in the compact bell room. The room was open to the air on all sides, through a metal screen which was wound around the four columns supporting the ceiling. The ceiling supported the tower atop which sat the Lowell House dome.

It was a warm, clear day, but the protruding ceiling kept the room in the shade. Edward and Richard had a panoramic view of Harvard and of much of Cambridge. A breeze was blowing from the direction of the Charles River.

“Not bad up here, huh?” Edward asked.

“The view is beautiful.” Richard had never before been somewhere so secluded which offered a view of so much activity.

Edward pointed out the places where he had lived, and was soon telling of his relationship with Elizabeth. While talking he paced about the small room, always looking out through the screen, usually towards the Lowell House courtyard. Richard sat facing the other way, and watched the people who were walking to and from Lowell House on the road which connected it to the rest of Harvard.

Nothing that Edward said really explained Elizabeth’s importance for him. However, for Richard Edward’s charm was in his having strong feelings, albeit often abrasive ones, not in his ability to explain them. Richard was glad to sit and listen to Edward’s story as he watched the people below going through a bit of their lives.

After an hour or so his attention was arrested by a young couple. The woman was elegant and very pretty. “Tall, thin, blonde, well-dressed, that was more or less your description, right?”

Edward hurried over from the other side of the room.

Richard pointed her out. Edward immediately said, “We’ll run down before they reach the glass door, turn into the courtyard to the right, then turn around and look like we’re walking out.”

They were in place when Elizabeth and Henry came into view.

“Rick! Rick Szabo!” somebody suddenly yelled from within the courtyard.

Richard turned and saw, twenty feet to the right of Elizabeth and Henry, Raymond Kim, a student whom he had known at Yale. He raised his hand but said nothing, hoping not to draw Elizabeth’s attention to Edward.

“How the hell are you?” Raymond cried.

Elizabeth looked to see who was being greeted so boisterously. As she saw the two men walking slowly towards her and Henry, the name Rick Szabo rang a bell in her mind, and she recalled that Edward had spoken to her months earlier of someone named Rick Szabo being “a bit less dull” than his other colleagues. Though Edward had looked down, Elizabeth concluded that

it was probably he.

As Richard saw Elizabeth's face turn towards Edward and himself, he was struck by her beauty, and by her somber air.

Henry also glanced over to see who was being beckoned. The two men walking towards them were unfamiliar to him, but he noticed that Elizabeth's eye rested on them.

"Do you know those guys?"

"I might. The one on the right might be Edward."

"Might be? The Edward?"

"Yes."

Henry arrested their walk; he wanted to get a look at the only other man Elizabeth had mentioned to him. "Should we say hello, or would you rather not?"

"Let's go in," she said. As she and Henry walked to her room in silence, Henry glanced back a couple of times to try to get a look at Edward, but his view was blocked by the other two men.

Richard Szabo, "Rick" to friends and acquaintances, "Dick" only to Edward, had never been in love.

He had found several women intriguing and attractive, but the intrigue never survived more than a few weeks, and without it the attraction withered.

No sight had ever promised so much to Richard as his brief look at Elizabeth's beautiful but sad face. While listening to Raymond Kim describe his life at law school, Richard was already thinking about whether he could see her again.

"Would I have seen how unusual she looks if she had not turned towards us?" he wondered. "Perhaps I should be grateful even for Raymond."

“Well, that was a bust,” Edward said after Raymond Kim had moved on. “What a time you picked to become popular!”

“He’s friendly with everyone.”

“Those people often are. So he wasn’t one of your intimates?”

Richard felt nauseated by Edward’s thinking, or affecting to think, that he could have been “intimate” with Raymond Kim.

“I guess I don’t need these any more,” Edward said after a minute, taking off his beard and sunglasses.

“You think she recognized you?”

“She looked at us for about two minutes; she wasn’t just wondering who had such a devoted friend.”

“That’s probably true,” Richard said.

“I guess we might as well go now.”

“Go? Back to New York?”

“Yeah.”

“That was it?”

“I’m ready to go back,” Edward replied. “I saw the happy lovers. Besides, she saw me, and I don’t really want to hover like a shadow.”

Richard thought for a moment. “Well, while we’re here, how about if we get together with a friend of mine whom I haven’t seen for a while.”

“One of you people?”

“You know, that might have been funny before the fiftieth time you said it.”

“Hidden defenses!” Edward cried. “Sorry if I offended, but I didn’t mean only to be funny.”

“I like girls.”

“If you say so.”

“I’ll call my friend,” Richard said. “I think you’ll like him more than you expect.”



“Okay. Go ahead.”

“The guy has a sense of humor,” Richard said as he walked towards a phone booth.

“Hello?”

“Carlos? I’m glad to reach you. It’s Richard Szabo.”

“Rick! How are you?”

“Not bad. I’m in town. Do you want to get together?”

“I’m having dinner with my girlfriend. You want to come?”

“Maybe, but listen. For reasons I’ll explain later, I’m here with a guy whom I’d like to have drive back to New York without me.”

“Okay. How can I help?”

“Can you think of a way he’d want to go back to New York by himself?”

“Do I know the guy?”

“No, I work with him.”

Carlos thought for a moment. “Did he go to Yale?”

“No, he went here, to Harvard.”

“Is he a sociable guy?”

“Not especially.”

“Then let’s meet now for a cup of coffee. I’ll say that two other guys we know from college are in town, and suggest that we all get together for dinner.”

Richard thought for a moment. If he suggested that he stay behind with Carlos and take the train back to New York tomorrow, Edward would probably feel fortunate to escape. “I knew you were the man for this situation,” he said.

“So I guess it’s been a long time since you were in this sort of situation?”

“I don’t notice that my phone has been ringing off the hook. Where shall we meet, my friend?”

Carlos Olvera was a young man who found it unpleasant to work, and unbearable to work in an office. Upon graduating from Harvard Law School, where he rarely attended class, he placed advertisements in Spanish-language publications. Soon he was able to initiate personal injury and employment discrimination lawsuits against several businesses, many of which resulted in profitable out-of-court settlements. He found most of his fellow Cambridge residents absurd, but “the generosity of the Massachusetts jury warms my heart,” he once said to Richard in explaining why he lived there. A desire to leave some distance between himself and his family also played a role.

However, his mother and sisters came frequently from Miami to visit him. They were amazed at how little work he did. His mother, who gained much of her scant knowledge of American life from television, once asked him earnestly how he supported himself so comfortably. His explanation evidently made little sense to her; afterwards she looked more worried than ever. When he asked what was troubling her, she asked if he was a drug dealer.

“Nothing so romantic,” he said with a smile.

“I’m sorry if I offend you. You know I pray for you every day, my dear Carlos,” she said with tears in her eyes.

“I’m not offended, mama. What I do is much worse than drug dealing.”

Carlos’s social life consisted largely of spending time with Heather O’Sullivan, a lively redhead who had recently graduated from Boston College. She hated her job working for an insurance company, but it had led to her meeting Carlos, the only man she had dated whom she never found dull.

“Cheerful guy,” Carlos said to Richard as they watched Edward drive away.

“He’s a bit abrasive, but I sort of like him.”

“So what’s the story?” Carlos asked.

“There’s a girl he and I saw today whom I want to see again,” Richard said.

“And she’s his girlfriend?”

“His ex-girlfriend, more or less. She has a new boyfriend.”

“Who is she?”

“Well, I don’t know her last name,” Richard said. “She’s a student here.”

“You know where she lives?”

“Yes.”

“The first thing to do is go there and find out her last name.”

“How?”

“Rick, that will be easy.”

So it was. In Elizabeth’s entryway in Lowell House was posted a placard listing its residents.

“I’d like to see her again before I leave town,” Richard said as they were leaving Lowell House.

“Of course,” Carlos replied. “Can I help?”

“No, I’d better handle it on my own.” Richard doubted that his friend’s methods would recommend him to Elizabeth.

“Okay. Shall we have dinner with my girlfriend? We can keep this to ourselves, if you’d like.”

“Sure, I’d like to meet her.”

“Though I don’t know if I should trust you, my friend,” Carlos said.

While the three of them were at dinner, despite his assurance to Richard, Carlos asked if he could explain the situation to Heather. “She might say something you’ll be interested to hear.”

Under the circumstances Richard could hardly refuse.

“Whatever a girl might say, she’ll be impressed by someone who sees her once and then can’t forget her,” Heather said, once Carlos had told the story. She sensed Richard’s reluctance to

talk about Elizabeth, but she felt well-disposed towards him, and she thought she might be able to help him out.

“She knows who you are, so she’s pretty sure you’re not psychotic,” Heather continued, as Richard sat looking uncomfortable. “But she’ll suspect that you’ve done this before. You should tell her that you never have, or, better yet, admit reluctantly that you have once before, and provide details. This should have been years ago, when you were young and foolish.”

Richard smiled, but said nothing.

“She won’t believe you at first,” Heather continued, “but she won’t be sure, especially if you repeat it. Of course I don’t know what the truth is.”

Carlos interjected, “I think I can vouch that Rick hasn’t done this more than two or three times.”

“You don’t think there’s a Don Juan behind those sad eyes?” she replied. “Girls fall for that sort of thing, you know.” She wrinkled her nose at Carlos. “Anyway, if they fall in love with each other, a fib at the outset doesn’t matter.” Turning to Richard, she continued, “You’ll have to persist. She’ll try to dissuade you, and she might be cold to you. Don’t be disheartened. Just keep calling or writing, regularly but not too often, and you’ll be making an impression, whether she admits it or not. This guy she’s with is probably just a kid in college. I think that if you keep it up, you’ll become important to her before long.”

Despite himself Richard found what Heather said interesting. He recalled this conversation often during the weeks that followed.

Richard awoke in Carlos’s apartment to a cool and wet Sunday.

Carlos heard Richard moving about, and pulled himself out of bed. “Do you want to come to mass? We could go at 11 am.”

“No, no thanks.”

“Still gripped by the forces of darkness?”

Richard smiled. "For the time being, at least."

Carlos went back to bed. Afternoon mass was one of the blessings in his life.

While he showered and dressed, Richard thought of how to see Elizabeth again. He borrowed a jacket of Carlos's, which was just large enough for him to be able to squeeze into it, and walked to Harvard Square.

Once he was at Lowell House, he waited for someone to let him through the glass door, and then walked to the cafeteria, where brunch was being served. He looked around there, but did not see Elizabeth.

He decided to regain the outpost in the Lowell House tower. He asked a student to let him into the entryway which contained the staircase to the bell room, but the student asked to see his identification card.

"I haven't got it with me," he said, unable in his surprise to come up with something better.

"Sorry."

Richard looked at himself. He was wet from the rain, and wearing a jacket out of which his wrists protruded. "I must seem like a dubious character. So how do I get in?" He thought for a moment. "The superintendent will remember me from yesterday."

At the superintendent's door was a sign saying that he would be out until noon. It was only 11:00 am. "Well, I'm hungry. I'll go get a bite to eat."

After finding three restaurants in which long lines of people were waiting for Sunday brunch, Richard decided that the line at the first restaurant had been the shortest. By the time he found his way back to it, the line had become longer than those he had seen at the other two restaurants. "Oh well. I might as well stick it out here."

His impatience grew as he waited to be seated, waited to order, waited to be served. The only part of the meal which proceeded quickly was the eating: he wolfed an omelette down in two minutes, and then sat ten minutes waiting for the check.

It was 12:30 when he got back to Lowell House. The light in the superintendent's room was out, and the sign was no longer there. Richard felt tempted to kick the door, but after a

moment he saw someone leaving the entryway which contained the stairs to the bell room, so he scurried in unnoticed.

Richard found his way to the bell room. With the clouds, the view was less clear but in a way even more impressive than on the previous day. He established himself in the post Edward had occupied, facing Elizabeth's entryway door.

The room was cool and damp, though the rain did not reach inside. As on the previous day, a breeze was blowing, but to very different effect. Before long Richard was shivering with cold.

"She might already have eaten, and she could spend the rest of the afternoon at the library," he thought. "But I have to see her if I can."

"Maybe she's with her boyfriend, wherever he lives," he thought a few minutes later. "What am I doing here anyway?" He recalled the description Heather had given the previous day of the effect persistence would have. "Well, I've got to do what I can."

Suddenly there was noise beneath him. People were mounting the stairs; he heard their voices talking and laughing.

He looked around the small room. If they came in, there was nowhere for him to hide.

A minute later three students entered, two men and one woman.

"These certainly are beautiful bells," is what Richard had planned to say, but he was nonplussed when he noticed that one of the men was the very one who had refused to let him into the entryway a couple of hours earlier. "Hello," was all he said, in an uncertain voice, as he looked at his potential accuser.

"What are you doing here?" the young man asked sharply.

"Looking at the bells."

"How did you get up here?"

"The superintendent let me in. I, I'm a bell-ringer also."

Fearing questions which might expose him, Richard left hastily amidst suspicious glances.

“I don’t really need to see her again,” he thought as he walked quickly down the stairs. “What I saw of her yesterday is reason enough to try to contact her.”

When he got downstairs he was surprised to see by the superintendent’s clock that it was only 1:00 pm. “Only a half-hour? And I’m so cold.” He reflected for a moment. “Well, I’m not made for sneaking around. Hopefully I’ll do better when it comes to speaking with her.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

“Dear Elizabeth,” Richard’s letter began.

“I am the man you saw with Edward Webster, whom I believe you recognized last weekend. I know that my writing to you will seem odd, to say the least, but doing so seems too important for me to be dissuaded by that.

“I will get to the point. One brief glimpse of you made more of an impression on me than any other woman ever has. Perhaps a trite statement, but what else is one to say when it’s the truth? You present an unusual combination of beauty and an air of sadness and depth. Sadness is a rare thing to see in a beautiful woman. How could I not contact you, and try to find out more about you?

“What shall I say of myself? I am 25, the son of Hungarian parents who came to America as teenagers. Like most educated people (I went to Yale), I earn my bread pushing papers about, but I’d love to live differently, to be a gentleman and farmer or a poet, or both. The times don’t offer these options, at least not to me, so I push papers, hopefully temporarily.

“I’m not very modern, I’m afraid, but you didn’t look to me as if you are either. I’d like to have a wife and family, and some close friends who are not engrossed by the hustle and bustle of modern careers. Right now I have none of these things, apart from my mother and two sisters.

“Are you a Christian? I was a devout Catholic while growing up. That fell away for a while, whether because of arguments I encountered, or because while I was at Yale faith seemed irrelevant, I’m not sure. However, lately I have again started going to Church occasionally. I find I don’t care about those arguments so much any more.

“Are you a music lover? I love much sad music, especially, I confess, Hungarian folk music. Sometimes I like what is done with it by Bela Bartok, sometimes not. I also like Chopin and some of the Russians composers. I play the piano, but not terribly well.



“From time to time friends of mine have tried to introduce me to their favorite rock groups. I have listened, but I never wanted to listen again. Though you didn’t look to me like a Madonna fan, if that is your taste, I will be eager to try harder than I have before.

“There are many things I’d love to know about you. Would it be okay with you if we talk sometime? I have your phone number, thanks to the Harvard operator, and I will take the liberty of calling you soon.

“Edward and I are friendly acquaintances, but not really friends. He told me that you are dating someone. If that’s true, I hope it won’t be a reason why we can’t talk. I’m curious to know more about you, whatever follows.

“With warm regards,

“Richard Szabo.”

Edward’s odd appearance had been a mystery to Elizabeth, and this letter was even more of one. At first she thought it was written by Edward, for some object which she could not fathom.

However, when she came to the line which said, “Sadness is a rare thing to see in a beautiful woman,” she paused. “It’s true,” she thought. “And it doesn’t sound like Edward.” She read the rest of the letter more slowly.

Though she still suspected that the letter was not what it claimed to be, she tried to recall the man she had seen with Edward. She could only conjure up a hazy image of a man of average height, with a round face and dark hair.

However, she had greater worries than Edward or his friend.

Later that afternoon Henry knocked on her door. After a few minutes he said, “I’m afraid I have more feelings. I hardly know where they all come from.”

Elizabeth smiled in spite of her trepidation.

Henry hesitated. Was he really going to say this to her? Did he really have a choice? “I feel a kind of emptiness, a lack of fulfillment.”

“How so?” Elizabeth noticed, not for the first time, that her voice had become more quiet when she was with Henry.

“I don’t know exactly,” Henry said. “I’m wary of being honest with you, or with myself.” He paused.

“I like to know what you’re feeling, even when it’s painful for me.”

He smiled. “Yes, it seems you do, but I wonder how long that can last. However, I can’t act my way through life.”

“You’re not much of an actor, my dear,” Elizabeth said.

“I sometimes wonder if this can be all,” Henry said. “The way things are between us feels so magical and beautiful; yet it doesn’t fill every moment somehow.”

“I’m listening,” she said after a moment.

“It’s more than I expected for myself, yet it’s not everything I expected. I know that doesn’t make sense.” He paused. “I have always felt like there exists somewhere a something spectacular I never really expected to have myself, maybe never even fully believed in. At first it seemed like maybe being with you was that thing, but now I feel less that way. Does that make sense?”

“Yes.”

“It does? Do you feel the same?”

“Not really, but what you’re saying is comprehensible.”

“I’d be worried if you felt this way.” He paused, and frowned. “What I’m describing is probably just a fantasy. I don’t really know what I think about it. I feel in a kind of limbo. Is the way you and I are together what my life was aiming at, or not? It certainly seems like it could be, and yet--.” He stopped.

“Go ahead.”

“I don’t know if I should, I really don’t know if I even mean what I’m saying.”

“Please, Henry, I’d rather hear it.”

He sighed. “There are probably limits to how much one human being can engage another, but the way we are together, in a certain way it doesn’t seem like all that much.”

Elizabeth nodded. “I’m sorry I’m not more for you.” She felt sad, but also, to her surprise, more at peace than usual. She felt as if something she had been dreading had at last arrived.

Eventually Henry couldn’t help wondering whether another girl might engage him more fully.

Certainly no woman he had known could bear comparison with Elizabeth. She was the best friend he had ever had, and one of few people he had met whom he consistently found worth paying attention to. When he talked, she listened carefully, unpretentiously: she rarely assumed she understood what he was saying when she didn’t.

But might there not be someone else who would make the world larger still, and who would not at times leave him feeling at loose ends? Might there not be someone equally engaging when she talked, but who talked more, someone in some way more vigorous or more intense?

Elizabeth was one of the most beautiful women Henry had ever seen. Yet even this did not affect him as it had at first. He often experienced her beauty as a kind of obligation, a statement that here was a woman whom he could not take for granted. But why couldn’t he prefer someone plainer, or cheaper, or less ethereal, if he wished? He didn’t wish, and obviously it was absurd to hold her beauty against her; yet he did not feel quite free in reacting to her.

He was fairly certain that nobody else would be as moving to him as Elizabeth was, that nobody else would touch his heart as she did. But this too, oddly enough, did not carry the weight it had at first. To find her “moving,” didn’t that boil down to a kind of feeling sorry for her? It was a sweet feeling, but might he not prefer being more excited to being moved?

Elizabeth was more attractive to him than any heroine of fiction he had encountered. He

thought he was happier with her than he would have been, for example, with Anne Elliott, or with Shakespeare's Juliet. But were they the limit of what was possible? What of Jane Austen herself, for one? Perhaps a ridiculous thought, yet she undeniably had existed.

One day Henry saw on the street an attractive redhead walking by herself. Her face was lit up by a vivid smile, apparently a private smile, as if at an incident which she alone had found amusing.

Though he did not consider talking to her, Henry did not want to let her pass from his life. He followed her for several minutes in order to find out what House she lived in; then he would be able to look her up if ever he wanted to.

For a few days afterwards Henry thought fondly, sometimes longingly, of this vision. Eventually its vividness waned, as he had expected; but he continued to feel that he was hiding what had happened from Elizabeth. There seemed little point in being faithful to Elizabeth if he couldn't be open with her, so he decided that he would tell her even this.

It was a relief and a pleasure to do so; and it made what he was describing seem insubstantial, almost ridiculous. Afterwards Henry still thought occasionally of the smiling redhead. But how could he want to pursue anyone else if so much of his pleasure in life depended on being able to share whatever happened to him with Elizabeth?

It struck her somewhat differently. Though not very surprising after what had come before, Henry's revelation was painful to hear. What could it mean except that his feeling for her was waning?

She half-wished he weren't so relentlessly open about his feelings. It might be nice if he could let the change in his heart show more gradually; and then her heart could perhaps respond gradually as well. But on second thought that seemed pointless, even dirty. At any rate, it was good for her to see what was really there.

Her thoughts also began to wander. Of course she wanted someone whose love for her

would last. But even apart from that, did Henry suit her as well as she had thought a few weeks earlier? At times she recalled the man she used to imagine. He too was forceful, though he cared little what he could do in the world, or to the world. He was more stable than Henry, and more loving, more gentle. Perhaps he was less exciting, but it was not excitement that Elizabeth felt she most needed.

And yet Henry's peculiar intensity, his drivenness, had an attraction which the man of her imagination did not rival. Henry absorbed her, he drew her out of herself. Of course he had the great advantage of actually existing. It was inevitable that a man of her imagination would seem insubstantial by comparison; but so did most people she actually knew.

Henry still said he loved her. Although it was clear that he often declared his love in order to mitigate the harshness of other things he was saying, Elizabeth for the most part believed that he believed what he said. But what did it matter if he was wrong? It did not seem like she was exciting to him any more. Perhaps what he felt wasn't love but friendliness, or pity, or fear of being alone.

On the other hand, perhaps his solitary and harsh childhood made it hard for him to trust or accept loving someone. Perhaps he actually did or could love her. There was no way for her to be sure; as long as he seemed to think he loved her, she had little to lose by waiting to see what would happen.

But she wondered what it would be like to be close to a man who really, clearly needed and loved her.

## CHAPTER SIX

As the summer approached Henry felt eager to work at something apart from school, and to think about something other than his relationship with Elizabeth.

He did not want to continue reading the authors to whom he had been introduced at Harvard, for there was much he needed to learn before he could fully digest what they said. Rousseau's praise of Sparta, Tocqueville's description of aristocracy, Nietzsche's attack on Christianity, were all beyond his grasp. He felt these authors had opened before him a door beyond which lay the world. He was not much closer to it than he had been before, but now he saw that it was there; he saw the ignorance in which he dwelt, an ignorance which became increasingly intolerable as his personal life grew less lonely and more settled. He was almost astonished at how unfamiliar he was with everything other than contemporary America and, thanks to novels he had read, 19th century Europe. What had it *meant* to be a citizen of ancient Rome, a monk in a medieval monastery, a courtier of Louis XIV?

This kind of historical understanding or tact seemed to Henry what he most needed. What were the real human possibilities? What could he himself do to enrich human life? For this remained his ultimate aim. His desire to learn had less to do with seeing how he might live, though he enjoyed imagining and considering different possibilities, than with seeing how he might enable others to live. He hoped to accomplish in his life a tremendous benefitting of others; that would be the substance and proof of his greatness. Greatness was still the thing which thrilled him and around which he organized his life.

Of course this meant he was approaching himself differently than he was approaching those whom he hoped to benefit. In seeking to enable them to live some particularly beneficial or rich way, he was not himself living that way. He thought about this inconsistency, but didn't find it troubling; he figured it grew out of the peculiarity of his nature. For better or worse, he cared

about what he might accomplish almost to the exclusion of everything else. Even his desire for love did not much temper his narrowness or single-mindedness, since it was a need more than a pleasure or good, a sweet thing without which he could not function more than an engaging thing in which he sought to dwell. As for learning, friendship, taste, they were to him so many pleasant trifles, though they were the goods extolled by the cleverest men he had encountered, ancient and modern. Though at times his character seemed narrow to him, even two-dimensional, his guiding passion was so thrilling that he did not much mind.

While he was in high school Henry supported *laissez-faire* capitalism, the only system in which, as he saw it, unusual people were free to accomplish great things, or to fail in the attempt. However, the books he enjoyed while at Harvard stood far from America's political battles, much farther than he could earlier have imagined. Nietzsche's statement that capitalism and socialism were part of the same movement made sense to him: Both were egalitarian, abstract, and of course economic. When he read this statement it struck Henry that it was possible to hold political views which do not assume equal rights. Why begin with equal rights, or with rights at all? What do rights say about how to live well?

During his two years at Harvard Henry had read a number of statements which suddenly opened up the world, articulated it in a sharp new way, often by laying bare an assumption he had unwittingly absorbed. But this experience was becoming less common. He needed to see more of the world before it could continue to unfold for him.

Henry prepared a list of books he might read, beginning during the summer. He would start relatively close to his own time and place, where his understanding would be easiest and surest, and then gradually move backwards and outwards. Histories by Macaulay, Churchill, and Ranke headed the list he prepared.

While looking at bookshelf one night he happened to notice *In Defense of Capitalism*, which had been his favorite political book when he was in high school. Its author was a prominent conservative, or rather "neoconservative," named Eric Kaplan. Henry read a few pages with pleasure. The prose was fluent and unpretentious, the subject meaty and engaging.

Suddenly it seemed a long time since he had paid attention to America, to current politics, to what is happening in the world today.

He wondered how the book as a whole would strike him. Unlike the books on his list, it was one he could read in a few hours.

Henry was also curious about himself. He felt more distance from democracy than he had earlier; but did that mean he would see America differently than a relatively sensible participant in its debates? He was curious to test the proposition that he had learned something while reading the “great books.” No doubt some of his views had changed, but had his tastes or reactions changed as well?

So Henry turned to the beginning, and re-entered the world of conservatives and liberals, of debates over “government intervention,” of accusations of elitism, sexism, racism.

He was surprised to see Kaplan declare that liberals gravitate towards views which advance their own power. To Henry it seemed obvious that the fundamental source of the views of liberals was a belief in equality. For them more equality meant more justice, and more inequality meant more injustice. Kaplan had the causal connection largely backwards. The elitism of liberals, their feeling of being entitled to power, was rooted largely in the belief that they would pursue justice more vigorously than others would.

Eventually Henry came to a chapter which dealt thematically with the intentions of liberals. He disagreed with most of what he read. However, Kaplan clearly saw this as the most profound and important part of his book, so if he wanted to see Kaplan, this was the place to go.

When he finished the chapter, Henry closed the book with disgust. For a moment he let the relief he felt sink in.

“Why can’t Kaplan get any of this right?” he then said aloud. “It isn’t that hard to see, if he would only look.” He articulated the thought which had been passing through his mind: “He seems to *want* to face this caricature rather than his real opponents.” Henry had always found contemptible the desire to minimize one’s opponents; it seemed equivalent to wanting a smaller life than one really has.



He recalled, however, that he admired some men who heaped scorn on their opponents, in particular Julius Caesar, of whom he had read in Plutarch. Henry felt excited by the readiness to use all resources in pursuit of a great object, and bored by the insistence that every man must bow to a common moral code. “But Kaplan seems to want to deceive *himself*,” he thought, “to *believe* what he says of his opponents.”

Henry wondered if he was being fair. He recalled what Kaplan had said, and was again struck by its inaccuracy, but he could not recapture the feeling that Kaplan *wanted* to see things as he described them. “But he develops his mistake in such detail, and with such energy,” he thought. “Someone without an ax to grind might hold such a view, but only if he had never thought much about it.

“Actually, Kaplan sounds similar to a liberal accusing conservatives of being elitist,” Henry continued. “Each says, ‘Those guys think they deserve more than ordinary people like you.’” Henry was elated by the profundity, as it seemed to him, of this insight. “They accuse each other of pursuing selfish ends, but that’s really secondary. The real crime is the thought crime, the evasion of the duty to subject oneself to equality. Which is why liberals usually hurl these charges with more sincerity, and with more effect.

“What is so distasteful is the way both groups pander to ‘the people.’ They look at their audience, and describe their opponents in terms that they think will infuriate the audience as much as possible.

“But that’s not quite right,” he thought after a moment. “The process is more honest than that. Their eye is not really on their opponents, but it is also not on the audience. What are they looking at?” Henry repeated this question to himself, but it did not offer a clear handle or grip; so he asked himself what it was that Kaplan himself was looking at as he described liberals.

“It’s an odd thing, but in a way he’s looking at nothing but a construct he has formed in his mind,” Henry thought. “He does not try to see liberals from the inside, and he does not even wonder much if his construct is really what they are. While writing this book he simply assumes that it is, and tries to describe it. In his moments of greatest honesty, he does not check the

construct against reality so much as check it against itself to make sure it's consistent. If he found it wasn't, then he would consider revising it.

“Well, that's going too far. Those wouldn't be his moments of greatest honesty. At times he probably *does* notice some feature of liberals. He asks himself if it fits in his construct, and if not, he might change the construct, or, if he could not incorporate this feature, he might even scrap it. But he doesn't begin by looking at liberals from the inside and trying to describe them.

“I think the point is that he just wouldn't *think* of doing that; it would not *interest* him. What prompts him to form the construct in the first place is not a desire to *see* what confronts him so much as a desire to *explain* it.”

He paused. “But do I really know that? How do I know what motivates him?” He turned his mind for a minute to what Kaplan had written. “He seems struck by certain characteristics of liberals that he thinks other conservatives have not seen, like their genuine ignorance about what businessmen do to make money, and their genuine belief that it must be something sinister. He develops a construct which encompasses these characteristics, but he never tries to enter into how the world looks to the people he is describing.

“Do I really know that? Yes, because his description is absurdly inadequate. A more honest description would create complications; he does not want to consider that liberals have a strong faith in equality as well as preposterous opinions about economics, let alone that their preposterous opinions about economics might be a *result* of their faith in equality. He does not want to say anything critical of this faith, or even of people who hold it. Perhaps he feels instinctively that in doing so he would pit himself against the moral force in our society, against a power which perhaps he hasn't quite explicitly noticed, and whose grip on him is therefore all the greater.”

Henry was pleased with his description. “But I'm just guessing,” he thought. “I don't know exactly what leads Kaplan to his mistakes, though I think I'm at least partly right.” He noticed that in not resting complacently with his idea of how Kaplan approached his subject, he was unlike Kaplan himself. “The difference isn't only that I don't hold onto my construct while

he does hold onto his. My construct was *better* in the first place.” With this thought a gush of excitement hit Henry, literally in his nose.

He paused to verify the comparison. “My construct was realistic, whether or not it fits him exactly. His is a caricature. As if people would define themselves by political opinions without being driven by a belief in justice. Whereas in my construct, the motives aren’t admirable, but they are possible: Kaplan’s desire to explain these people who don’t share his views, operating in a background of limited concern for the truth. It’s clear that he really doesn’t care that much what his opponents are like. But that’s a great insight!” Another gush of excitement hit Henry in the nose, and tingled his throat and head.

“And Kaplan is one of the best people writing about these things! Yet what I could do would be so much better. I could write a book in which I would describe liberals, and conservatives too. I would simply show both groups, show how the world looks to them, as they really are.”

Henry rose from his chair and began to pace the room. “*I could do that, I could do something so much better than anything being done now. Actually it’s absurd, my reading the stuff these people write; it’s so far beneath me.*

“I’m only 19, not even 20, and my superiority to people like this is just obvious. And Kaplan is one of the best people thinking about politics in the country!” Henry clenched his right hand into a fist, and then pounded it into his left hand. An ecstatic feeling of power coursed through him. “I will be able to do so much. So much.” He stopped pacing, clenched his jaw, and tilted his head slightly downward. “I will bend the world to me.” A moment later he whispered the same words aloud through clenched teeth: “I will bend the world to me.”

Henry was filled with an ecstasy greater than any he had experienced in his life. He walked to his mirror and looked himself in the eye. Keeping his jaw clenched, he opened his mouth and bared his teeth in a slight snarl, but he did not repeat his new phrase before his image. After a moment he resumed pacing.

As he began to feel, though still vital, no longer filled with almost an excess of energy, he

was struck by the vagueness of his ambition. What would it mean to “bend the world” to him? Yet the phrase still thrilled and satisfied. “Somehow or other,” he added aloud.

His bedtime was drawing near. He thought of Elizabeth, whom he always called before going to bed on the nights which they did not spend together.

He felt intruded upon. Of course it was no fault of hers; but the intrusion was all the greater in that she was someone with whom he usually shared his thoughts, and at the moment he did not feel like sharing his thoughts.

They talked for only a minute before saying good night; Elizabeth sensed his reluctance to talk, and she had no wish to extract the performance of a duty.

She felt strange when she hung up the phone. The person to whom she was closest in the world, the person she cared for above all others, had just been cool, distant, polite.

What was her connection with him? What did it mean? She felt as if far away from herself. She looked at a photograph of Henry which she herself had taken several weeks ago. It did not evoke a warm feeling, or any feeling. She looked away from it, not knowing what to do with herself.

For a minute she sat motionless.

She looked back at the picture. She was struck by the frankness of his mien. “He does look serious,” she thought. “And he is handsome.” She recalled some of the feelings which the picture had evoked on other occasions. Slowly she began to smile; those feelings were still comprehensible to her.

However, she still felt far away, and peculiarly empty. “Does he love me?” she wondered. “I don’t really think so, at least not right now.

“It seemed like he did before, but if it could end so quickly, then I guess he didn’t.” She thought for a moment. “If loneliness exaggerated his feeling, it’s not surprising. I don’t doubt that he liked me, and was glad to know me.” A twinge of pain gripped her at the thought that they

might not know each other for long, at least not as they had up to now.

Upon hanging up the phone, Henry felt relieved; his duty discharged, he could return to his thoughts. But the thoughts had gone, not to be regained. Nonetheless, he felt relieved to be by himself.

After a few minutes he felt remorse as he recalled how he had sounded on the telephone.

While he lay in bed waiting for sleep, recollections of certain moments in the conversation forced themselves on him with peculiar vividness. He had been worse than harsh; he had been cool. He felt hot around the ears and cheeks as he imagined how he must have sounded to Elizabeth. Would she think he did not care for her?

After an hour he got up, dressed, and walked to her room.

The night together was sweet for him.

For her it was bittersweet; every night together now seemed as if it might possibly be the last.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Richard called Elizabeth several times after sending his letter. She did not return his calls.

Distasteful though the prospect was, he decided to see if Carlos or Heather had any advice.

“I wouldn’t even think of being disheartened yet,” Heather said when Richard told her what had transpired. (Carlos had given her the phone as soon as he realized why Richard was calling.) “But I would suggest you leave her answering machine alone for a while.”

“For how long?”

“Well, for now. Try sending her flowers instead.”

“You don’t think she’d mind?”

“No. It’s hard for a girl to mind getting flowers, even if she wants to.” She turned to Carlos. “You know, you should be listening to this.”

Richard heard Carlos in the background. “You make me another apple pie and you might be surprised.”

Heather returned to the phone. “I should listen to my mother. She’s full of witticisms about men’s stomachs.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t think you want to know. Any more questions, Romeo?”

“What do I do after sending flowers?”

“Wait a few weeks, then send some more.” She paused. “You should attach a note each time. Nothing fancy, just ‘Thinking of you’ or something like that.”

“Then what?”

“Then maybe another letter, but not for several weeks.”

Richard was impressed. “Do you think all this up on the spot, or is this how Carlos courted you?”

“Could you repeat that to Carlos?” In the background Carlos cried, “Maybe you should give me tips when you’re done with him.”

“I’m just imagining what I might like if I were in her position,” Heather said to Richard.

“What should I do during the summer?” Richard asked. “The school year is almost over.”

“That’s a good question.” Heather thought for a moment. “I think it might be best to send her flowers once before school ends, and then wait a while, to make sure she doesn’t feel like she’s being followed.”

“Should I contact her at all during the summer?”

“The summer is a long time. Things might end with her boyfriend. You could try writing her a letter and sending it to her parents’ house in the middle of the summer, but you shouldn’t call or send flowers there. In the fall you could try something bolder, maybe come up here and knock on her door at school.”

“Wouldn’t that scare her?”

“Yes, it probably would a little bit, but when nothing bad happens and you continue to behave like a gentleman of bygone days, that won’t necessarily have been a setback for you.”

“That makes sense,” Richard said. “There is one other thing.”

“What’s that, Romeo?”

“I want to talk to Carlos, to figure out how to get her parents’ address.”

“You are helpless, aren’t you?”

“I guess I was wrong about you,” Edward said one day as he entered Richard’s office.

“How so?”

“I’m not a very smart guy, but I’m not a very dumb one.”

Richard looked at him questioningly.

“Our meeting with your Spic friend a few weeks ago,” Edward continued. “You generously offered to take the train home from Boston so you could see your chums without inconveniencing me.”

“What of it?”

“You’re not really the sort of guy who is eager to hang around with the guys.”

Richard said nothing.

“I’ve been curious since then. You know, you’ve been cooler to me since we got back.”

“I’ve been busy with the Staples presentation.”

Edward allowed a minute to pass before replying. “Some of the secretaries here get excited if they have a chance to go out with one of us management guys.” He paused. “So you take one of them out, and you talk of this and that; of course you’re curious about her boss.” Again he paused.

Richard sat stone-faced as Edward continued. ““What do you think he does when he goes home?” you ask. ‘I’m probably his closest friend here, and I’ve never seen him with a woman. You don’t think he’s one of those people, do you?’” Again Edward paused. “You’d be surprised how eager one of the little ladies was to talk about a call she placed to a florist.”

Richard said nothing.



“I hope I won’t be endangering the career of that little lady if I reveal that sometimes she listens in on her boss’s phone calls, when she’s curious, when it’s something a bit unusual.” He paused. “Like that call to the florist.”

“She didn’t say that.”

Edward smiled for a moment before replying. “How do you know?”

“If she did listen to my calls, she wouldn’t tell you.”

“Not on the *first* date.”

Richard frowned. “So what are you getting at?”

“Like I said, I was wrong about you. You’re a regular guy, Dick.”

“As I told you myself.”

“As I confirmed, myself.”

They stared at each other for a moment in silence. Edward then smiled and said, “I was wrong about you in more ways than one. I thought you weren’t quite as much of a son of a bitch as the other guys around here. Not that there’s any reason why you shouldn’t be.” He paused. “Maybe I am dumb. Maybe I am.”

He smiled, then turned and walked out.

Edward’s hatred of Richard ran deeper than he revealed.

Elizabeth was the only person in Edward’s life who had made him feel that someone perhaps loved him. He had always doubted her; her feelings had not made sense to him; he had even taken a pleasure in rebuffing her; yet when she wanted their intimacy to end, the possibility of happiness seemed suddenly to vanish for him.

He had found his friendship with Richard more comprehensible. With an eye attuned to weakness, he had guessed immediately that Richard did not stand very high on the office totem pole. Richard seemed to lack the inclination towards rivalry and boasting without which it is difficult for a man to make much of an impression on his fellows. From the outset Edward felt free to look down on him in a certain way.

As they became friendly, Richard's simplicity and seriousness made an impression on Edward. For the first time in years he came to feel interacting with someone to be something other than a kind of game, a more or less overt competition. Nonetheless, or for that reason, he allowed himself a peculiar degree of license in mocking Richard. Without thinking much about it, without ever being terribly warm, he showed more of himself to Richard than he had to anyone else.

A week after Elizabeth told him she was seeing another man, Edward suddenly had to wonder if Richard was hiding something from him. Nightmarish though the prospect seemed, he immediately suspected that it had to do with Elizabeth.

He felt that the ground that had remained under his feet was being yanked away. At first, inclined though he generally was to distrust people, he hoped that his suspicion would prove false, and that he might soon be joking about it with Richard. But Richard did not stop by his office until several days after they had returned from Boston. When he came, he did not seem at ease. And when he left, he did not come again for weeks.

Edward soon felt as if he were sinking. There was nobody else he could talk to, nobody he even pretended to consider a friend. As he attempted to maintain the routine of his life, there grew the sensation that something dark and horrible was enveloping him.

There often flashed into his mind images of his childhood, of his cool and sarcastic father,

of the slatternly and often intoxicated mother who had died when he was young. Before knowing Elizabeth and Richard, Edward had trusted nobody. The time in which he had known the two of them had come to seem like the whole of his real life; the rest was empty, pointless, even dirty. But now he saw that he had known much better where he stood in the earlier years. Distrusting everybody had been a wise policy; but he didn't know if he could bear returning to it.

Edward no longer slept much. He sometimes fell asleep at a normal hour, but then awoke abruptly after one or two hours of sleep. Then he would lie in bed, feeling alone, scared, enveloped by darkness. During the day he felt exhausted, yet only slightly less terrified.

Soon it was difficult for him to think clearly, to do anything at his job, to buy groceries and pay bills and say hello to his neighbors. His mind revolved constantly around Richard and Elizabeth, and the darkness which was overtaking him. This darkness seemed to be the onset of insanity, or of death.

The thought that Richard and Elizabeth had come together, or would soon do so, seemed to Edward the final emblem of his own insignificance, his own nothingness, his own death.

But perhaps he could destroy their union. Perhaps he still had more power than they realized.

His mind regained a certain clarity as he considered that with one blow he could destroy their union and avenge himself on Richard's contempt and duplicity. He felt hatred for Elizabeth, but he had never quite trusted her to begin with, and he felt that with her there had perhaps been harshness on both sides. The thought of Richard, however, evoked only pain and burning hatred. It would be some consolation to destroy the man who had done so much to destroy him.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Henry had arranged months earlier to take a summer job with a financial firm in New York.

He felt he would like to live by himself for the summer. There was much reading he hoped to do, and he longed for the clean air of solitude. However, he did not want to lose Elizabeth, and he felt he had to assure her of his attachment. He suggested that they rent an apartment together in New York.

A bit surprised at the suggestion, Elizabeth said she doubted he would be happy if they lived together. After a more or less frank conversation they decided that they would both live in New York, but in separate apartments.

Elizabeth found an internship at a publishing house, and arranged to share an Upper East Side apartment with Stephanie Mills, the girl who had introduced her and Henry several months earlier. Henry found a one-bedroom sublet in Greenwich Village, from which he could take the subway to his Wall Street job.

Once the summer began, they saw each other every two or three days. Their evenings together usually ended at Henry's apartment; he rarely went to Elizabeth's. Occasionally she invited him to a movie or to dinner when he had not called her, but he rarely accepted.

Elizabeth soon felt that their lives were mostly separate. Henry's verbal assaults had ceased, but she took this to mean that the amount of time they had been spending together at school had been an irritation for him. Though they were much closer than she and Edward had ever been, Elizabeth could not help being reminded of her other summer in New York.

Was this all she would have in life, romantic beginnings which dwindled into more or less distant “relationships”?

Could it be she? Richard wondered. He had seen her only once, four months earlier.

When they drew near each other he noticed that she looked sad, as she had on the earlier occasion. “Excuse me,” he said.

Elizabeth hastened her step.

He talked quickly. “I’m sorry if I’m disturbing you. You’re Elizabeth Gagnon, aren’t you?”

She looked at him, and half-recognized, half-deduced who he must be.

“I’m Richard Szabo, the person who has been, um, trying to contact you.”

“Yes, I remember you now.”

“I didn’t know you were in New York. Is it okay if I walk with you?”

“I don’t want to take you out of your way.”

“I wasn’t going anywhere very interesting. In fact, I’d like to go out of my way.”

They resumed walking. “The flowers you sent were pretty, thank you,” she said.

“I’m glad you liked them. Have you been here long?”

“Since the beginning of June.” It was early in July.

“I’m sorry we didn’t see each other earlier,” he said. “Have you been enjoying your summer?”

“I can’t say that I love New York. Do you?”

“No, far from it. But it is a good place to make money. I hope to gather a fair amount and

withdraw from the hustle and bustle, as I think I told you in my letter.”

“Do you think you will be able to?”

“I hope so. I don’t spend much. But I hope not to withdraw by myself.” He glanced at her. “I didn’t mean anything by that,” he added.

She smiled. “I didn’t think you did.”

They walked for a few seconds in silence. “Do you have a job here?” he asked.

“Yes, for the summer.” She stopped walking, and turned to him. “Thank you for walking with me, Mr. Szabo. We are near where I am going.” She held out her hand.

“Can I get you a cup of coffee or dinner or something?”

“No, thank you.”

They shook hands. “I hope we see each other again,” he said. “Can I call you?”

She thought for a moment. “I’d rather not.”

“I hope we see each other again,” he repeated. “My number is listed in Manhattan if you would like to call me.”

After they said goodbye, he watched her walk down a side street.

It was a pleasant meeting, she felt.

She did not see Henry that evening, and fortunately Stephanie was working late. She cooked dinner for herself, and afterwards sang a part from a Bach cantata. “I must be in a good mood,” she thought as she noticed her choice.

When Henry called her shortly before bedtime, they had a friendly conversation, but her cheerfulness had not originated in talking with him. After hanging up, she thought of Richard.

She was intrigued by his saying that he hoped to retire young. She tried to recall the letter he had sent her months earlier, but all she could remember was that there had been a lot in it about Hungary, and the statement that beautiful women don't often look sad.

She wondered what he was like.

Richard concluded that Elizabeth probably lived near the spot where they had parted. He began to spend as much time on the Upper East Side as he could, though he lived on Riverside Drive.

After a few days his diligence paid off.

"Miss Gagnon!"

"Oh, hello."

"How is your summer going?"

"It has its ups and downs," she replied. "And yours?"

"I guess I could say the same." He paused. "Is your job one of the ups or one of the downs?"

"More the latter."

"How so?"

She thought for a moment. "The people at the publishing house where I work seem more interested in what is said about a book than in what it's like to read it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they want to publish things that will be considered serious and relevant, but they don't really focus on how a book strikes them personally."

“I thought that the bottom line was the main consideration in publishing these days,” Richard said.

“That’s true too, but that comes as less of a surprise.”

“The bottom line is pretty much the only thing in what I do.”

“What is that?”

Richard described the work of his consulting firm. “It doesn’t mean much, but I don’t do it for its meaning,” he concluded.

“You told me last week that you hope to retire young.”

“Yes, I do.”

“What will you do if you retire?” Elizabeth asked.

“I’d like to spend time with family and friends,” Richard said. “I don’t share the American passion for having a career. I hope to live at a slower pace.”

“What will you and your family do together?”

He thought for a moment. “We’ll live. Have you read *Doctor Zhivago*?”

“Yes.”

“I liked the scene where Strelnikov asks Zhivago why he wants to go to the provincial town where his wife’s family lived before the Revolution, and Zhivago replies, we want to find quiet. What they do takes care of itself.”

“I was struck by that scene,” Elizabeth said. “But I wondered if Zhivago meant what he said.”

“How so?”

“Well, he’s not with the woman he loves.”

Richard smiled. “But I hope to be with the woman I love. I just need to find her.”



Elizabeth said nothing.

Richard invited her to have a cup of coffee or dinner with him. She told him that she had plans for the evening, which was true; they arranged to meet for dinner the following evening.

Elizabeth seemed removed to Henry that evening. He found her a bit mysterious, and noticed with pleasure the erosion of the mild feeling of constraint or obligation that he often felt around her.

When he tried to make love to her that night, she said that she would rather not.

He called her when he got home from work the following evening. "I just wanted to say I love you," he said.

"That's why you called now?"

"Yes."

"That was nice of you," she said, wondering at his timing.

"I'm sorry if things are often not what you'd like."

She did not reply.

"Well, I guess I'll let you go. I love you." Not wanting to leave a silence which might pressure her to reply, he quickly added, "Maybe we can see each other tomorrow."

"You look beautiful," Richard said as Elizabeth entered the restaurant where they were meeting. I was afraid you wouldn't come."

She smiled. "Here I am."

They talked of various things while waiting to be seated.

“So, what do you do with yourself in your free time?” he asked after they ordered dinner.

Elizabeth thought for a moment of Henry. “Various things,” she said. “How about you?”

“Various things,” Richard replied with a smile. “I mentioned some of them in the letter I wrote you.”

“I’m afraid you should probably tell me again.”

“I read a good deal of poetry. I especially like a Hungarian poet named Csaba Nagy whom you probably haven’t heard of. I also like T.S. Eliot, and, I hesitate to confess, Wordsworth and Coleridge.”

“I don’t know them well,” Elizabeth said.

“Do you like any poets?”

“I like Goethe, but I’ve never taken to poetry very strongly.” This had actually been a disappointment for Elizabeth. She had hoped that poetry might suit her taste better than prose, but poems she had read generally struck her as somewhat artificial and didactic.

“What have you taken to?” Richard asked.

“I like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, and some other novelists. Music is a bigger part of my life.”

“What type of music?”

“Different kinds. I listen to Bach and Haydn, and to some of the late Romantics.”

“That’s a refreshing reply,” Richard said. “Most people cite rock groups. Of course they ‘like classical too,’ but never seem to know any particular piece other than Beethoven’s Fifth.”

This seemed an exaggeration to Elizabeth. “What do you listen to?” she asked after a

moment.

“One thing I like is music based on folk tunes, especially some of what Bela Bartok did. I also like Khachaturian, Vaughan Williams, and others.”

“I have not listened much to any of them,” Elizabeth said. “I think I’ve been put off by Bartok’s dissonances.”

“I like it better when he stays closer to the old melodies, though I like his dissonances more than I originally did.”

“Things which sound harsh at first sometimes come to seem beautiful,” Elizabeth said, thinking of Richard Strauss; while speaking, however, she thought of Henry, and of his warmth in their telephone conversation.

“I don’t think I find Bartok’s dissonances beautiful, but they’re interesting,” Richard said. “His music intrigues me more than anyone else’s, but I more consistently like Chopin and Tchaikovsky.”

“I love Chopin,” Elizabeth said, trying to focus her attention on the conversation.

“Do you have a favorite Chopin piece?”

“I especially like the Preludes,” she replied. “And also some of the Ballades and Nocturnes.”

“The Nocturnes are my favorite. Do you play?”

“No, I don’t play the piano. Do you?”

“Yes, but not very well.”

“Have you played much Chopin?” Elizabeth had considered taking up the piano in order to play the Preludes.

“I studied the Waltzes and the Nocturnes, but that was many years ago.” He paused.

“Do you play an instrument?”

“I sing,” Elizabeth replied.

“You sound like you would be a singer, now that you mention it.”

Richard was excited to find that this beautiful woman was one of the few people he had met with a real taste for classical music.

Elizabeth, however, was puzzled by much of what Richard said. It seemed peculiar but possible to her that someone could take to Bartok, but how could anyone prefer Chopin’s Waltzes to his Preludes? She wondered what animated Richard’s taste, but did not quite feel inclined to try to enter into it. Of course talking about music with people was usually much worse than this; Richard’s taste did at least seem more or less genuine. “Being with Henry has spoiled me,” she thought.

She gave brief answers as Richard asked about her favorite songs. As the conversation started to dwindle she asked him about Hungary.

The families of both his parents left the country during the Soviet invasion in 1956, he told her. His parents met at their high school in Albany, where many Hungarian families had settled. He had made two trips to Hungary with his family while he was a boy, and he had spent three months after college living in Budapest with his cousin.

By then what remained of the Iron Curtain had come crashing down. Richard enjoyed his time there, he said, and he felt he had more in common with his cousin Akos and other young Hungarians he met than with most Americans. However, while he was considering settling there, his father died of a stroke, and he hurried home. Once back in America he found his current job, and decided to stay put until his two younger sisters were married or finished with college.

“Has staying here been a hardship for you?” Elizabeth asked.

“I have mixed feelings about it, but that was also true before my father died. My youngest sister got married recently, and my other sister finished college last year, so I could go back now, if I wanted to.”

“Why don’t you?”

He smiled. “Well, it will sound odd, perhaps, but I don’t really find Hungarian women attractive. I guess I’m staying partly to see if I fall in love with someone here.”

“Do you find American women attractive?”

“Many of you are very pretty. I don’t think most men would prefer Hungarian women in that respect. Hungarian women also tend to be less thoughtful and more girlish, though I think they make better mothers. Some have a bit of sadness about them, which I like.”

“Sadness is an attraction for you?” Elizabeth asked. Richard had said that his cousin Akos had “an air of sadness.”

“I guess it makes me feel more at home with someone,” he replied. “I think we Hungarians tend to be that way. Did you know that Hungary has the highest suicide rate in the world?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“I remember watching a World Cup soccer match one year while I was in high school. The Hungarians were playing the Soviet team. Of course they wanted to win very badly; this was while they were still under the Soviet thumb. They had a good team, but they lost 9-0. Any Hungarian watching could tell what was happening: Once the Soviets scored the third time, the Hungarians lost all hope, their game collapsed, and they were just eager for it to end. The Soviets scored six goals in the last 10 minutes.”

“That seems understandable.”

“It is to me,” Richard said.

Elizabeth agreed to have dinner with Richard again that weekend. She felt curious to know him better, but she doubted that she could be frank with him.

More than anyone else she had met, he seemed conscious of the nation to which he belonged, in spite of or because of his not exactly belonging to it. “He has unusual feelings,” she thought, “but he seems to approach life as a member of a group, just not the one most other people belong to.” She thought also of his not being especially moved by Chopin’s Preludes.

“The first evening with Henry did not make me think I could love him,” she recalled. “But it was different. From the outset Henry was intriguing.” She thought of the first conversation they had shared. “What did we talk about? That tree in *War and Peace*, and his attack on metaphors.” She smiled, and followed in loose chronology some memories of their times together. After a minute, she came to the second evening at *Chez Pierre* and Henry’s subsequent strangeness. “So this is where it all led.” Tears filled her eyes. “If I have to move on, so be it.”

Edward was astonished, yet not astonished, at the report of the private investigator he had hired to watch Richard.

Richard had gone to a restaurant on the Upper East Side with a tall, thin blonde woman, and then had walked with her to an apartment building on East 74th Street, after which he had taken a cab home.

Edward felt certain that the woman was Elizabeth, though he had not known she was in New York. He went to the building whose address the private investigator had given him; sure enough, “Gagnon” was written in a woman’s hand on one of the mailboxes.

He told the private investigator to call him immediately if Richard should meet this woman again.

## CHAPTER NINE

When they next saw each other, Henry asked Elizabeth what she had done the previous evening.

“I went out to dinner,” she said.

“Where?”

“The Polish restaurant around the corner.”

“By yourself?” he asked.

“No, I went with someone I met recently.”

“Someone you met recently? A man or a woman?”

“A man.” She paused. “I thought I should simply tell you directly.”

After several seconds Henry asked, “Have I lost you?”

“I don’t know, Henry. Things haven’t been good between us.”

Henry knew that his behavior had been outrageous; but suddenly this seemed to live for him in a way it hadn’t before. His face burned as he considered how he had behaved, and what a fool he had been not to realize that he would surely drive Elizabeth away sooner or later.

However, there was a chance all was not lost. “What are you planning to do?” he asked.

“I don’t know.”

“I’m sorry for the way I have been. At the moment I can’t quite make sense of it.”

“It doesn’t seem like I matter very much to you.”

“That’s certainly not true,” he declared. “I love you. I don’t know how to explain the



way I've been."

Henry asked about the man she had seen. Elizabeth told him a little of what she knew.

"Do you like him?"

"I'm not sure. I'd rather not discuss it."

"That's understandable," Henry said. After several seconds, he added, "It is amazing to me how I have behaved. I have always loved you, but I can see I haven't shown it."

During the evening he made many protestations of love. However, Elizabeth felt that there was a step by step quality to what he said, as if he were saying what he felt he needed to say in order not to lose her. There was nothing which felt like a clean break, a new beginning.

Elizabeth told him she wanted to spend the night by herself.

Henry called her when he got home. He talked of how his childhood had made it difficult for him to trust anyone, easier to believe that he could dominate than that he could be loved. He said he wanted to understand himself better, to see if this feeling might fall away.

An hour later he called again. He said that he loved and needed her. He said he knew that it would be the last thing on her mind at the moment, but that he wanted to marry her. He said he would wait to see what happened between her and Richard, and hope he might have another chance.

In the morning shortly after she woke up, he called again. He had not slept, he said. It terrified him to imagine how much better Richard must look to her than he did. He said he had never shown how he loved her, not even when they first knew each other.

Elizabeth's date with Richard that evening was pleasant, more than she had expected.

They shared a superb dinner in Little Italy, took a moonlit walk by the Brooklyn Bridge, and spent hours talking over cheesecake and cappuccino.

By the time the evening ended Elizabeth felt she had a sense of what Richard was like. Though she enjoyed his company more than she had during their first date, she also felt more confident that he lacked a certain individuality. Nothing he said could not be said in a group of sympathetic people, while he tended to speak of groups to which he belonged or partially belonged: Hungarians, lapsed Catholics, “modernity.”

His opinions about feminism, religion and diversity of religious belief, and other things would be generally unpopular among people he knew; however, these opinions did not precisely seem to be his own, not the way Henry’s were, for example. She felt that Richard had acquired a way of viewing things as part of belonging to a certain group, or a certain number of groups. He had reluctantly strayed from his initial perspective to some extent, but then the change was in the direction of a new group: agnostic or atheistic educated people. The possibility that reality might not reside in any group or any compromise among groups did not quite seem to live for him.

Insofar as he had thrown in his lot with an unpopular group, he was eager to defend what he believed; but his perseverance in believing it seemed to matter almost as much to him as its truth. He prided himself on not being intimidated by being unfashionable.

When she got home that evening, she found several messages from Henry on her answering machine. He had asked her to call him whenever she got home. She called, but there was no answer.

The phone woke her during the night.

“I’m sorry it’s so late,” Henry said. “I couldn’t bear sitting in my apartment, so I took a long walk.”

“That’s okay.” She looked at the clock; it was 2:20 am, about an hour after she had gone to bed. “How are you?”

“Not too bad, I guess. I’m in the neighborhood. I found myself walking towards you, and, well, I’d like to see you, if that’s okay.”

She told him he could sleep on the couch.

Elizabeth and Henry took a long walk together in Central Park the following day, a Saturday. When they returned to her apartment there was a message on her answering machine from a police officer.

She called back.

“I’m trying to reach Officer Dovizio.”

“Speaking.”

“I’m returning your call. I’m Elizabeth Gagnon.”

“Thank you for getting back to me, is it Miss Gagnon?” Dovizio asked.

“Yes.”

“I’m calling all the people listed in Richard Szabo’s address book. When was the last time you saw Richard Szabo?”

“Yesterday evening. Why?”

“Yesterday evening. That makes you of interest to me. Are you a close friend of Mr. Szabo’s?”

“We’re friends. What’s wrong?”

“I might as well tell you that Mr. Szabo was shot and killed late last night.” He paused for a moment, but Elizabeth said nothing. “Of course we’re going to need a statement from you. How long had you known Mr. Szabo?”

“The first time I talked to him was about two weeks ago.”

“And you and he were friends.”

“Yes, I think we were.”

“That’s interesting,” Dovizio said. “Now you must have been one of the last people to see him alive. I’d like to get a statement from you. I can send a car for you.”

Elizabeth looked at Henry. She considered asking Dovizio to wait on the line while she told Henry what was going on, but then she felt reluctant to let him know that Henry was there. “Send a car, yes, that would be okay.”

“We’ll see you soon, Miss Gagnon.”

She hung up the phone.

“What was it about?” Henry asked.

“Richard has been murdered.”

“Richard murdered? When? What happened?”

“Late last night was all they told me. He was shot.”

Henry felt astonished and relieved, but hid it as best he could.

“They are sending a car for me.”

“Why?”

“To get a statement,” Elizabeth said.

“Wow. Would you like me to come?”

“I think it would be better if you didn’t.”

“Should I wait here for you?”

“If you’d like to.”

Elizabeth was sitting in a room with Dovizio and one other policeman.

Dovizio was looking at Elizabeth. “Now it was interesting to me that you said you knew Mr. Szabo for only two weeks.” He paused. “Sometimes when people find out someone they know has been murdered, they instinctively try to minimize their knowledge of the victim, minimize their recent contact with him, that sort of thing. Maybe they don’t want to get involved. Maybe they even have some irrational fear that they will be suspected, though murder had been the farthest thing from their mind.” He paused again. “Now you really had known Richard Szabo for more than two weeks, hadn’t you?”

“No.”

“When did you live at Lowell R-23 at Harvard University?”

“I left there at the end of May,” Elizabeth said.

“And what is it now, July 19th?”

“I guess so.”

“So in Mr. Szabo’s address book there was an address of yours from over six weeks ago?”

“He sent me a letter and some flowers during the spring.”

“When you hadn’t met?”

“That’s right. He wrote in his letter that he had seen me and decided to write to me.”

“Do you have this letter?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“You threw it out?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know how he got your name and address?”

“He was with someone I knew when he saw me.”

“Was that in New York?”

“No, at Harvard.”

“I see,” Dovizio said. “Were Mr. Szabo’s attentions irksome to you?”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“But you never responded.”

“No.”

“Until two weeks ago.”

“Yes.”

“What was different about two weeks ago?”

“My situation had changed.”

“Might I ask how?”

“Well, I had been dating someone, and things were not going well.”

“Do you still know that person?”

“Yes.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

Elizabeth paused, and said, “Earlier today.”

“Was he there when I called you?”

“No, we were out taking a walk.”

“I see. But he was there when you called me?”

“Yes.”

“You and he met earlier today?”

She paused again. She felt her face becoming hot. “He came over late last night.”

“What time?”

She considered lying, but she didn't really think Henry had done it. “About 2:30.”

“What is this fellow's name?”

She told him.

“So things are going better now between you and Henry, if you don't mind my asking?”

Elizabeth looked down. “I don't know how to answer that.” She looked up. “Do I have to answer these questions?”

“You can refuse to answer questions, but that will force us to focus our investigation on you and Henry Larson. Nobody is accusing anybody of anything; I'm just trying to figure out what happened last night.”

“Henry and I were together from 2:30 on.”

“The time of death might have been before then.” He paused, and looked her in the eye.

“Did Henry Larson commit this murder?”

“No.”

“Do you feel certain that he didn't?”

“Yes, I feel certain that he didn't.”

Dovizio did not believe her.

## CHAPTER TEN

Henry was brought to the station in the car that took Elizabeth home. He had guessed why the police wanted to talk to him.

Elizabeth went back with him. She wanted to warn him that he was a suspect, but Dovizio sat between them in the back of the police car, and made conversation with Henry.

Dovizio felt certain that Henry was the murderer. He expected to find a young man shaken by fear and remorse. Henry's calm surprised him, but it made him all the less inclined to doubt his guilt: Someone innocent who thought he was suspected of murder would be more nervous, more eager to please. Dovizio concluded that Henry must be a very cold-blooded young man.

Once they were at the precinct, Dovizio took Henry into his office with a police stenographer. He asked Henry to describe his whereabouts the previous evening.

When Henry had finished, Dovizio asked, "What time was it when you arrived at Miss Gagnon's apartment?"

"I'm not sure. A little after two."

"Miss Gagnon said you arrived there at 2:30."

Henry thought for a moment. "That might be right."

"Could it have been later than 2:30?"

"I doubt it, but I'm not sure."

Dovizio waited a moment before continuing. "Is Elizabeth Gagnon your lover?"



Henry thought for a moment about how to reply. "Well, she has been."

"Until how recently?"

"The last time we made love was about ten days ago."

"Was that when Richard Szabo came into the picture?"

"I think so."

"But you stayed at Miss Gagnon's apartment last night?"

"Yes."

"So things were not over between you?"

"I'm not sure," Henry said. "It's hard to explain."

"I can see that." A married man with three young children, Dovizio disliked what Henry was saying, and his unembarrassed manner in saying it. "Go ahead and try."

There was a silence of several seconds. "I'd rather not," Henry replied.

"Did you kill Richard Szabo?"

"No."

"Did you hire someone to kill him?"

Henry smiled. "No."

"Why do you smile?"

"Sorry. I wouldn't know how to find someone to hire."

"We're trying to find out who murdered a man whom your lover was dating. Obviously we have reason for suspecting you."

"I realize that."

"The idea of this young man having been murdered doesn't upset you?"

"I didn't say that."

“You don’t seem very upset.”

Henry thought for a moment. “I didn’t know him.”

“So you’re glad he’s dead?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But you are?”

“I’d rather not answer that,” Henry said.

“That’s a question you’re going to have to answer sooner or later.”

Henry said nothing.

Dovizio paced the room for a moment. “Do you know where I went to college?” he abruptly asked.

Henry looked up. “No.”

“I went to SUNY Purchase. Now I’m sure all you Harvard students must be three times as smart as I am. But that isn’t going to help you in front of a New York jury. It would be better for you if you were frank with me, and if you cut out the flippant attitude.”

“I didn’t mean to be flippant,” Henry said.

“Now I’ll ask you again, and I tell you that if you’re frank with us, we’ll do what we can to make it easy for you. If not, the state is going to be as hard on you as it can be, and you’ve got a long life ahead of you in which to suffer the consequences. Did you murder Richard Szabo?”

“No.”

“Did you murder Richard Szabo?”

“No.”

“Did you murder Richard Szabo?”

Henry could not resist smiling. “No.”

“You think this is funny?”

“I’m sorry.”

“What’s funny about it?”

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t help it.”

“You couldn’t help yourself last night?”

“No, I couldn’t help smiling. It’s like a scene from a movie.”

“So this is all funny for you? Like the movies?”

“No, I didn’t mean that. I’m sorry.”

“Where were you last night before 2:30 am?”

“As I told you, I was in bed, then I was walking for a long time.”

“Of course nobody saw you.”

“Well, a lot of people did, but not anybody I recognized.”

“Maybe you got to Elizabeth’s apartment in time to see Richard Szabo taking her home, maybe you followed him back to his apartment, maybe you shot him there?”

“No. I think I’d better have a lawyer with me before you question me further.”

“Have you got a lawyer?”

“No, I guess I’ll have to call my mother.”

“Yeah, kid, you’d better call your mother, but I don’t think she can help you very much now.”

Henry had trouble resisting laughing.

Dovizio pushed a phone in Henry’s direction.

“Oh, you want me to call now?” Henry asked.

“Yeah, let’s get your lawyer here.”

“Are you planning to arrest me?”

“We’ll see how it goes when your lawyer is here.”

“This is going to be a toll call, you know.”

Dovizio rolled his eyes and looked at the other policeman. “The guy thinks he’s on David Letterman.”

“Well, I didn’t know if you knew.”

“Go ahead and call.”

Henry dialed the phone. “Hi Mom.”

“Henry? I didn’t expect you to call on a Saturday evening. How are you?”

“Not too bad. How are you?”

As Henry’s mother replied, Dovizio cried, “Could we get to the point, please?”

“Mom, this is going to be hard to believe, but I’m a murder suspect, and I think I should have a lawyer with me.”

There was a silence of several seconds. “Henry, are you drunk?”

“No, it’s the real thing.” She did not reply. “Hold on a minute,” Henry added, as he turned to Dovizio. “She doesn’t believe me. Maybe if you talk to her for a minute.”

Dovizio sighed, but he took the phone. “Hello, Mrs. Larson?”

“Yes.”

“This is Lieutenant John Dovizio of the 34th Precinct. We have been asking your son some questions about the murder of Richard Szabo. Is that name familiar to you?”

“No, it isn’t.”

“Mr. Szabo was murdered last night after a date with Elizabeth Gagnon. Is that name familiar to you?”

“Yes, it is.”

“It’s okay if I put your son back on the line now?”

“Yes, please.”

Henry took the receiver. “So, what do you think, Mom? Do we have a lawyer?”

“Of course we have a lawyer. If this is some prank you’re playing with one of your friends, you’d better tell me now.”

“No, it’s the real thing.”

“I’m going to call Paul Glover, and if this is a joke and he drives out to New York for nothing, it’s going to cost a lot of money.”

“I guess it’ll probably cost some money even if it’s not a joke.”

“Henry!”

“Maybe Mr. Glover can recommend someone who is already in New York.”

“Well, I’ll call him and see. Where are you?”

Henry gave her the address of the police station.

“Henry, are you in trouble?” she asked.

“I hope not.”

“Have you done anything wrong?”

Henry smiled. “Mom, there are two policemen in the room with me. What could I possibly say?”

After hanging up the phone, Henry said to Dovizio, “I’m sorry if I seem flippant. I feel like I should say that I really am innocent. Sooner or later something will probably come up which will clear me, and if you have focused your attention solely on me, it might be harder for you to catch the murderer.”

“We’ll worry about that,” Dovizio replied. This was a pose he had seen before. It was the first thing Henry had said which made him seem more human.

As soon as the lawyer contacted by Henry’s mother arrived, he told Henry to say nothing. He demanded that the police either release or arrest Henry immediately.

Dovizio told the lawyer he expected to arrest or release Henry within the hour; he was hoping to turn up stronger evidence before arresting him. He had one officer combing gun store records to see if Henry had ever bought a gun in New York, Connecticut, or Massachusetts, another interviewing Richard Szabo’s neighbors, and two others, with freshly issued search warrants, on their way to Henry’s and Elizabeth’s apartments.

The police officer at Richard Szabo’s apartment soon called.

“Raphel? What is it?”

“I’ve found a neighbor who saw a man leave the building late last night.”

“What time?”

“A little before 3 am.”

“Description?”

“Caucasian, 6 feet tall, dark hair, probably early twenties. Our witness says the guy was holding his head down, but he saw most of his face anyway.”

“Can you bring him here?”

“I’ll sure try.”

The witness arrived half an hour later, and was taken to Henry.

He looked at Henry for a moment. Henry looked back. “No, that’s not the guy,” the

witness said.

“Are you sure?” Dovizio demanded.

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“But you hesitated.”

The witness continued looking at Henry. “They look a little similar. They’re about the same height. But the guy I saw wasn’t this thin, and his face was different.”

“You’re sure you’re not just reluctant to testify?” Dovizio asked.

The witness looked at him. “I’d love to help you convict a guy who killed someone in my building, but this isn’t the guy I saw. I’m not saying he’s not involved.” He paused, “Maybe the guy I saw was this guy’s brother, helping to clean up or something.”

“Sorry, I don’t have a brother,” Henry interjected.

Dovizio sent the witness to a police artist, but he refused to allow Henry to leave. He told the lawyer that he would hold Henry until the apartment searches were complete. Dovizio decided that he would arrest Henry even if the searches turned up nothing; a night or two in jail might shake his calm.

While they waited Henry’s mother arrived at the station. When she saw Henry, she frowned slightly and then hugged him.

“Even his mother thinks he’s guilty,” Dovizio thought. “He must be a delightful kid.”

“Mom, this is Lieutenant Dovizio.”

“Hello, Mrs. Larson.”

They shook hands.

“And here is Elizabeth,” Henry added.

“Hello, Elizabeth,” Mrs. Larson said, looking at her with a sad smile. Elizabeth thought she must want to show that she did not blame her for Henry’s quandary, and she was surprised that this would occur to her under the circumstances. However, Mrs. Larson’s feeling towards her was more particular than Elizabeth realized: She felt a kinship with Elizabeth through their both having to bear the burden of Henry’s misdeeds.

Sarah Larson was a woman who strove to live correctly. After her divorce she had become a social worker for the state of Connecticut. A diligent and efficient worker, she had risen to an important administrative post. She also did volunteer work for the American Civil Liberties Union, through which she had become friendly with some important people, including a Yale Law School professor whom she was dating.

Throughout her life, however, and especially as she had grown successful, she had felt that someday something would reveal her as an outsider, an actress or poser in some way. Perhaps it was being Jewish, or being of lower-middle class background; she wasn’t sure. But she didn’t really think there was a general cause. It seemed to be unique to her, and beyond that she didn’t like to think about it.

However, Henry’s transgression suddenly seemed the ineluctable destiny of her own life. She had been too vigilant to be revealed through herself, so she would be revealed through her son. It seemed fitting, even inevitable. Since Henry’s phone call earlier that evening, she had felt more than ever before that she had finally arrived where she belonged, and more than ever before that Henry was part of her.

“You must be Thomas Franck,” she said to the lawyer.

“Yes, that’s right.”



“May we talk by ourselves for a minute?” she asked Dovizio.

“Sure, if you’d like.”

Franck turned to Henry and said, “Not a word out of you while I’m gone, young man.”

“Sure.”

Though the search warrants turned up little, Henry was arrested later that evening. The judge for the district refused to set bail before Monday morning, so Henry spent two nights in the precinct jail. His mother was allowed to bring him fresh clothes from his apartment.

Henry found it entertaining to be a murder suspect, but by Sunday he was eager for it to end. His confidence that something would turn up to establish his innocence waned as the hours passed, though he still doubted that he could be convicted of murder on the evidence the police had. He eagerly awaited news about the case from his lawyer or his mother, but little was forthcoming.

Alone in his cell, he could not avoid imagining what had happened on the night of the murder. Oddly enough, he eventually found himself wondering what made him so certain that he was innocent. After all, he was glad that Richard was dead. Perhaps his memory had failed. He did not really think so, but he wished he had requested a lie-detector test when he was first arrested; now he was not certain that he would pass one.

On Monday morning the judge set bail at one hundred thousand dollars, which Henry’s mother paid that afternoon by taking out a second mortgage on her house. Henry wanted to go home to his apartment, but his mother, who had legal custody of him, insisted that he come to Stamford with her.

The coroner set the probable time of death between 2 and 3 am on Saturday, but no new evidence implicating Henry turned up. Beginning to worry that the arrest might not stick, Dovizio questioned Elizabeth again, more aggressively than he had before. He implied that she might be arrested for perjury or even as an accessory after the fact if she was concealing something.

“Have you considered that he might really be innocent?” Elizabeth asked when Dovizio told her she could go.

“I think we both know he’s not innocent,” Dovizio replied.

“I can think of one other person who had a motive, and there may be others you haven’t considered.”

“So who is this one other person?”

“He and I were once friends, and I don’t mean to imply that he murdered Richard, but I’m surprised at how exclusively you’ve focused on Henry.”

Dovizio said nothing for half a minute. “You can go if you’d like.”

Elizabeth stood still for a moment. She then said quickly, “His name is Edward Webster. He worked with Richard. He and I dated years ago.”

Dovizio decided he had to send someone to talk to Edward Webster.

Edward had spent an hour with Richard in his apartment before shooting him. Gun in hand, Edward sat on the sofa while Richard sat in an armchair several feet away.

“You underestimated me, Dick,” Edward said. “You couldn’t do anything without my knowing about it. You and your Spic friend thought I just wouldn’t be a factor.”

After they sat in silence for a minute Edward asked, “So how did you outmaneuver the Lothario we saw her with that day?”

“He’s still her boyfriend,” Richard replied. “She’s only seen me twice, as a friend.”

Edward sneered, but he felt frustrated and angry that even now he couldn’t *prove* Richard was lying, certain of it though he felt. Even now, gun in hand, he wasn’t really a player in this game.

“What would you have had me do? I couldn’t very well not pursue such a beautiful girl, could I?” Richard asked, trying to appeal to Edward’s oft-stated belief that everybody is out for himself.

“You did right to pursue her, Dick. I’m not saying otherwise. Now I do right to get even.”

“But it’s so far beyond getting even,” Richard replied, “and at such a cost for yourself.”

“I’ll worry about that.”

“If you want to leave now, I wouldn’t be able to prove you were here. There’d be no point in my calling the police, since it would be my word against yours.”

Edward smiled. “I’d rather it were just my word.”

“If you get caught, you’ve thrown your life away, because I got together twice with a girl you used to know.”

“You know, maybe you’re right,” Edward said. “Maybe we can even still be friends!” He smiled. “Sorry, Dick. The fact is, your time is almost up.”

Richard thought that Edward would likely end up doing nothing, as long as he didn’t provoke him, so he decided to say little, especially about Elizabeth.

Edward would have liked it if Richard had squirmed more, but he enjoyed himself

nonetheless, more than he had in months. Eventually, however, he felt himself beginning to get tired; he had slept little lately. Once he caught himself dozing off, and he decided he had better finish the job, though in fact he no longer much wanted to.

He had expected the deed to be grisly, but he had not expected how much it would be so, nor had he foreseen that he would regret what he was doing as the actual event approached, and especially in the moment of shooting Richard.

After he had shot him once in the chest, he had no choice but to go ahead and shoot him again in the head, just to be sure.

As he left Richard's apartment, he felt sickened at the vivid physicality of the deed, and he felt more pity than he ever had in his life. He would have given much to be able to undo the whole thing.

When he turned out the light in his bedroom later that night, he immediately saw the impact of the second bullet in Richard's head. He turned the light back on, but the vision remained. He felt disgusted at this thing he had done.

By morning his mind was racing frantically, dominated by a few alternating impressions: the bullet hitting Richard's head; the moment before shooting Richard when he felt distaste at the prospect of doing so, when he still might have held back; images of the day when he and Richard had gone to Harvard, and of the first time they had met, two years earlier.

Eager to escape himself, Edward telephoned people he knew on Saturday, but he found it intolerable to try to follow what they were saying, even to hear their voices, though the pain of being left to himself was greater. Wrenched by disgust and terror, he was consoled only by the thought that he had taken an enemy with him. He no longer really hated Richard, but at least he had done something harsh to someone who had been responsible for what was happening to him.

Soon an image of shooting himself, in the temple just where he had shot Richard the second time, began to join the other images racing through his head.

It seemed fitting that he should die, and the thought of his death calmed him down more than anything else. However, it was also wrenchingly sad. He did not really want to die, unless he had to, unless there was no other way to escape this pain and darkness.

He considered confessing to the police. This would remove some of the horror of his situation, but his life would still be black and bitter, while he would no longer be free to end it.

Flashes of memories joined the images racing through his mind: Elizabeth telling him over the phone that she was seeing someone else; his father laughing after Edward had fallen while ice skating when he was a child; his mother snapping at him once when he was five or six, for what he did not remember; fleeting visions of elementary school teachers and classmates; sitting at dinner with Elizabeth on their first date, years ago, feeling unusually hopeful.

He could not stop the images racing through his mind. He wondered what made him so sure that his mind had operated differently in the past, or even that the memories he was having were of real events. Was he going insane? The only thing that seemed clear was that his life was drawing to a close.

The recollection of his first date with Elizabeth was bitter as well as sweet, but it was much more pleasant than his other memories. He tried to recall other times he and she had spent together. At first he couldn't do it—the other images kept surging to the fore, bringing agony and a sense of utter failure, drawing him towards accepting the logic of his own death—but then he told himself that he might be recollecting Elizabeth for the last time, and he was able to focus to some extent on memories of her.

He thought of confessing what he had done to her. Could that save him? She would

probably react badly, but what did he have to lose?

Hadn't he always hoped for something from her? He had not trusted her. Very likely he would be confirmed in having distrusted her. But what choice did he have? She was the only possible bright spot left to him.

As he lay awake Sunday night, Edward decided to see her the next morning, as soon as the sun was shining. However, later that night he fell asleep, for the first time in three days, and woke up at 7 am. When he reached her apartment an hour later, she was not there. It was a relief, however, simply to see her apartment building and her name on the mailbox, to see that his nightmare was perhaps not the only reality.

He did not know where she worked, or when she was likely to come home. He did not know what to do with himself, and he was terrified of the long day ahead of him.

He went home and dressed for work, intending to pass the day there, if he could. But everyone at the office was discussing Richard's death, which had been the page one story in the morning's *New York Post*, along with an account of Henry's arrest. The news that somebody else had been arrested made little difference to Edward; it was only after several minutes that he thought to wonder if this was the man he had seen with Elizabeth at Lowell House.

After an hour, he left the office, and went back to Elizabeth's neighborhood. He walked up and down her block for about two hours, then ensconced himself in a restaurant across the street.

"It would be nice to sleep," he thought. "To forget this whole nightmare." The three or four hours of sleep he had gotten the night before had been the best thing to happen to him in days. "God, how wonderful it would be to wake up and find this was all a dream."

Elizabeth returned to her apartment shortly after four. She had gone to Henry's judicial hearing in the morning, and had spent a little time visiting him when he was returned to jail afterwards, while his mother went to Connecticut to raise the bail money.

She remembered fondly, as if it had happened long ago, their Saturday afternoon together in Central Park. Could his warmth then have been caused by having a horrid crime on his mind? It did not seem likely, and she thought Henry was probably innocent; but he had surprised her before.

What would become of him? If convicted, would he survive years in jail? What would become of her if he didn't? She didn't feel as bound to him as she had months earlier, when being with him had been a new and surprising happiness; but she did feel closer to him than she had at any time since they had come to New York. He had recently been quite warm to her, and she thought it possible that the prospect of losing her had made him more aware of his real feelings. However, she also thought it possible that with the threat of Richard removed, he would eventually revert to his former coolness.

Would they have a chance to spend time together? Or would she remain uncertain for years about how things could be between them? She felt that she couldn't wait for Henry, if she was lucky enough to meet someone else whom she could love. He had not really given her reason to do that. But it was much more likely that she would wait alone, with little reason to think she was waiting for something good.

Of course if he had killed Richard, which did seem possible, his situation was a very grim one, but she wasn't sure she could be part of it. Dark and repellent to her was the possibility that he had preferred murdering a rival to showing her more warmth; but it seemed more likely that he

was innocent, and she did not dwell on the dark possibility that he wasn't.

What about Richard? Elizabeth was of course appalled at what had happened to him. She felt that she would have enjoyed the chance to know him better, and she was sorry that he was no more. But she also felt that his tragedy was not really hers; she had known him well enough to feel more or less sure of that.

As she was unlocking the outer door of her apartment building, she heard a man approach her from behind. She glanced over her shoulder. There was something familiar about the face, but it took her a second to realize who it was: Edward's skin was pale as she had never seen it before, except for the dark rings around his eyes. His eyes had a desperate and haggard look. He had apparently missed a large spot while shaving, and his hair and clothes were somewhat disheveled, all of which was very uncharacteristic of him.

She immediately felt with relief that it was not Henry who had killed Richard.

Her next thought was how to convince Edward to confess.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

They stood without speaking for half a minute.

Edward was surprised at how beautiful Elizabeth was. Had she always looked this way? “I was wondering if we could talk,” he said.

Elizabeth wondered if he was dangerous. Perhaps he had come to kill her; but perhaps not. She wanted to do whatever she could without seriously endangering herself to encourage him to confess. “Talk about what?” she asked.

He looked at her for several seconds. “Well, if you don’t want to,” he said, but could not continue. He was surprised at the pain he felt: His hope in her had been stronger than he had realized. He thought he should leave, but that seemed tantamount to death.

“I’m sorry to hesitate,” Elizabeth said, “but you look so strange, and, well, I know that your friend Richard was murdered, probably by someone who knew him.”

Edward nodded blankly.

The thought occurred to Elizabeth that he might have come in order to confess to her. “Edward, how do I know that you’re not dangerous?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I just need to talk.”

“Do you see why I’d be worried?”

After a few seconds, he nodded.

“Are you considering hurting me?”

He shook his head.

“You really just want to talk?”

“Yes, I need to talk to you, to tell you something.”

“Is it okay if I ask you to turn out your pockets?”

He shrugged his shoulders, then did so.

“Let’s go up,” she said.

Once they were in her apartment, Edward sat staring into space for several minutes. Being with Elizabeth made him feel better. He did not have to hide from her what he had done; she seemed already to have guessed. Nonetheless her concern that he might hurt her had made an impression on him; the idea had a certain fascination for him.

After several minutes, she asked, “Can I get you something to eat or drink?”

He asked for a glass of water.

After she brought it, he said, “I guess you know what I want to say.”

“I have an idea, but I might be wrong,” she replied.

“I might as well tell you. I killed your friend Richard.”

“That’s what I thought you wanted to say,” she said after a moment.

Edward was beginning to feel that he could breathe again. Yet it occurred to him that now that Elizabeth knew what he had done, only she stood between him and nobody knowing.

“Why are you telling me?” she asked.

He sat for a moment. “I couldn’t keep it to myself, I had to tell someone. I guess you matter to me more than anyone else does.”

“That’s the first time you’ve said something like that to me,” Elizabeth replied after a

moment.

He considered this for a moment. "I suppose it is." They sat in silence for a minute.

"I've cared about you for a long time," he added.

"I thought you did when we first knew each other, but you never said so."

"I guess I didn't see the point in saying it."

"It would have mattered to me at the time," she said.

"I guess I thought you knew."

"No, I was never sure."

"I didn't want to show it," he said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. It just didn't seem like the thing to do." It was a great relief to be talking and thinking about something other than having killed Richard.

"I don't know if you know," Elizabeth said after a minute, "that the man I've been dating has been arrested for the murder."

"I saw that in the newspaper."

"Of course I want him to be released."

"That's no surprise," Edward said. He suddenly felt more alone, more bitter. There came to his mind a recollection of his telling Richard, "The wench has found another fella."

"I can't help hoping that you confess to the police, but I still wish you well."

"Sure." Edward felt he would like to leave, but leave for what? "The fact is, it looks like I'm near the end."

"I'm sorry, I hope it turns out otherwise." After a pause, she asked, "Do you have any plans?"

“I wasn’t planning to confess, if that’s what you mean.”

“That wasn’t what I meant.”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do. I can’t take the way things have been for me the last few days.”

“Why did you do it?”

“He was running circles around me, mocking me, acting as if I didn’t matter in my own life. I felt like I needed to destroy him. But I guess I knew that by killing him I was probably ending my life too.”

“And you still wanted to kill him?”

“Yeah. My life wasn’t worth much.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. Rick was the only guy around here I liked.” He paused. “And you didn’t want to have anything to do with me.”

“If I mattered, why did you want to see so little of me in the past?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “What can I say? I thought that was the best approach.”

“How so?”

“I guess I thought I’d try to keep the upper hand, keep my cards close to my chest.”

“But what was the point?” When he did not reply, she added, “What was the point of having the upper hand, when we never saw each other?”

“I don’t know. It just seemed like the thing to do. I guess I thought it might change at some point. In a few years I might have wanted us to get married.”

She smiled. “So by ignoring me you were courting me.”

For a moment he felt angry at her smiling at him, but what she said made an impression.

“Maybe I was going about it in a stupid way, I don’t know.”

“It was unconventional, at any rate.”

They sat in silence for a minute. “This is the most frank you have ever been with me,” she said.

“I guess so. What do I have to lose?”

While the hope that Edward would agree to confess to the police was uppermost in Elizabeth’s mind, she found that she felt a kinship with him, in solitude if nothing else. “You haven’t gone about living your life so well,” she said. “I don’t think it needed to be quite so harsh.”

“No?”

“There have probably been people who could have cared for you.”

These were mere words to Edward, words he had often heard without paying much attention. “I suppose you mean yourself,” he said.

“I doubt I was the only one,” she said.

“Now you’ve found another fella.”

“Yes, after you ignored me for a long time.”

“I went to see you twice at school.”

“Twice in a year and a half is not much.” She paused. “Do you remember that day in New York two summers ago, when I asked you whether you wanted us to have a future together?”

He smiled. “Yeah, I remember. I guess I was hard on you that day.”

“It would have made a difference to me that day if you had said some of the things you’ve said now.”

He nodded for a moment. “I can see that,” he said. “I guess I wanted to avoid being as

attached to each other as we had been at school. It seemed like the ball was in my court, so why not make the most of it?"

This remark pained Elizabeth. Her mind returned to the present, and to thinking of Henry. "What do you plan to do?" she asked.

"I don't know." He paused. "What do you want me to do?"

"I think you should confess to the police."

"You mean you want your boyfriend to be released."

"Yes, I do," she said. "But apart from that, I think it would poison your life to know that someone was in jail for what you had done."

"You do?"

"You don't look like you've done very well the past few days."

"That's certainly true."

"I hope you don't die."

He looked at her. He did not quite believe her, but he was not sure of disbelieving her either, and the possibility that she was sincere seemed to be all he had in life. "Really?" he asked.

"I still care about you."

"That's why you want me to confess?"

"I think it's the only way."

He looked down, and stopped trying to doubt her. "Even if you do care about me, you'll marry this guy sooner or later, and you'll stop thinking about me. I'll be alone there in jail. It might be better for me to die now than to face that alone."

"Edward, the police will probably start to suspect you sooner or later whether you confess or not. The case against Henry is thin, and I already told them about your friendship with Richard

and about our having known each other for a long time.” She paused, but he did not reply. “I think it might go better for you if you confess. If you do, and you end up in jail, I’ll try to visit you at least a few times a year, more if you’re nearby.”

“So you want me to confess.”

“Yes, I do.”

He shrugged his shoulders. She was not offering much, but it was better than the alternative. “All right. I’ll confess.”

**END OF PART ONE.**