

The Sleep of Reason

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John Williams

The Sleep of Reason

(from a novel in progress)

The sleep of reason brings forth monsters.

Francisco Goya

He lay prone on the rutted stone path, his bare torso raised and supported by his right forearm, while his left arm and open hand reached vainly toward the empty cave where late had rested the dead body of the Christ he had denied. The musculature of his body and the lines of his face were contorted in an agony of regret as deep and unchangeable as the fissures in the yellowed marble cliff that rose beyond the path where he lay, and his unmoving features shone starkly in the light of the eastern sun reflected by that stone. From one of the fissures a fig tree had grown, and its leafless branches twisted upward as if to escape the scene which composed it. To the northwest, upon a distant hill, above the prostrate figure and the cave and the marble cliff, an irregular line of white and ochre village houses could be seen. And above the village, the western sky was serene and clear with a cerulean translucence, as if this were a day like any other.

“There’s something wrong with it,” Paul Mathews said, and frowned, as if puzzled by his own words and by the sound of his voice, which was hollow and reverberant in the cavernous room.

The ornately framed painting was held at an upright angle by a sturdy easel and illuminated by the only light in the room, a large flood on a wheeled tripod. The man who had spoken leaned forward above the painting, and regarded it uncertainly; his right arm was folded across his lower chest,

and his left hand cupped his chin. He was a tallish slender man in his early fifties; he wore a blue pin-striped suit and a white shirt with starched collar and cuffs. The harsh light from the flood sharpened his features, deepened the lines on his face, and glinted upon the gray that was beginning to show in his dark hair. He shook his head slowly and uncertainly.

“Wrong? What’s to be wrong?”

The voice, deep and liquid and softly Germanic, came from the shadows beyond the pool of light. The one who had spoken stepped forward and stood beside Mathews. He was a heavy rumpled man in his middle sixties, and his name was Theo Dietrich. His olive-green trousers needed pressing, a soiled gray sweatshirt bulged over his belly, his white hair was tousled in a fine mist that seemed to float above his head, and a day-old stubble of beard shone on his face.

“What’s to be wrong?” he asked again.

“I don’t know,” Mathews said. “Nothing, probably.” He drew back from the painting and adjusted the floodlight so that the varnished surface glistened out of the darkness.

Dietrich remained where he was, his head uptilted, looking down at the painting through the lower lenses of his thick glasses. “The varnish is new,” he said. “It is perhaps the varnish?” He looked quizzically at Paul Mathews, and lightly drummed the fingers of both hands on the bulge of his sweatshirt.

Mathews took a few steps backward from the painting, still looking at it, his clear gray eyes puzzled by what he saw or did not see. Then he turned abruptly and walked toward a long table set against a wall in the dim room; his footsteps cracked sharply and echoed in the silence. When he returned into the pool of light that surrounded the painting, he was holding a large magnifying glass. He bent forward lightly and began to move the glass apparently at random above the surface of the canvas. It was a big painting, nearly six feet in length and more than three feet high; it took him several

minutes to make even a cursory inspection.

Theo Dietrich watched the silent examination with what appeared to be an imperturbable placidity, but when he spoke his voice had an edge of impatience. "Its pedigree," he said, "— it is impeccable, you know. Berenson himself, in 1928, authenticated it, and —"

"Berenson authenticated many things," Mathews said, "and then deauthenticated them, and then changed his mind again."

"This was not for Duveen, nor for any dealer. There was no advantage. It was for —"

"I know," Mathews said. He continued to inspect the painting, turning the magnifying glass at various angles above the surface. "It was for the d'Ursine catalog. I've read it."

The silence in the room was broken only by the wheezing sound of Theo Dietrich's breathing.

"It is not, you know, precisely like the other Mantegnas you might have seen," Dietrich said at last. "It is late middle, after the classical period and before those allegorical things that —"

"Don't lecture me, Theo," Mathews said, not looking at him. "I'll listen to you about fifteenth century Flemish, but not about Quattrocento."

Dietrich's laughter, low and rumbling, echoed in the room. "No respect," he said. "Not for age, not for authority. . . ." But he did not speak again until Mathews straightened and moved away from the painting. Dietrich said: "I ask again, what do you see that is wrong?"

Upon his open palm Mathews absently tapped the edge of the magnifying glass, and then he walked slowly across the dark room and replaced the glass on the table.

"It is in extremely good condition," Dietrich said, "for so old a work. When? 1480, 1490? But we have both seen others nearly as old in such condition. What else, then? Restoration? Do you see too much restoration?"

Mathews shook his head. He was not looking at the painting now; his gray eyes were narrowed against the light, and they looked steadily at Dietrich.

"It's in extremely good condition, and I can see no signs of restoration at all," he said, and hesitated. "That isn't what bothers me."

"Then what?" Dietrich cried, and thrust his hands, palms up, toward Mathews. "What?"

"I don't know," he said. "Let's call it a feeling. Nothing more."

Dietrich nodded. "A feeling," he said, and sighed as if in relief. "They are funny things, these feelings. You cannot trust them, and you cannot distrust them." He clapped Mathews lightly on the shoulder. "Come, let's go up. I need a cigaret."

But as Mathews nodded and started to walk away from the circle of light where they had been standing, Dietrich's grip tightened on his shoulder. "Do you remember," Dietrich said slowly, "do you remember that little Titian we bought when you first came to the Institute?"

Mathews smiled. "All right, Theo."

"Do you remember?"

"Yes," Mathews said. "I had a feeling then, too, and the next day it was gone, and I couldn't understand why I had it in the first place. And, yes, this is probably the same thing."

"Of course," Dietrich said. "Don't think about it. Wait till tomorrow."

"I'll get the lights," Mathews said.

Dietrich stood beside the floodlight while Mathews went across the room to the far wall and turned on the overhead lights. The harsh blue brightness of the neon made them blink; and when Dietrich switched off the warm but enfeebled glow of the floodlight, Mathews punched the elevator button beside the light switches. Dietrich joined him; and silently, as they waited for the elevator, they surveyed

the large holding room that a few moments before had been in darkness. Around the walls of the otherwise empty room, leaning haphazardly against the walls and sometimes against each other, were some eighty or ninety square and rectangular wooden crates of various sizes, none more than ten inches thick.

"It is one painting out of maybe a hundred," Theo Dietrich said. "You will see the others, you will see them all together the end of the week, maybe next week. And then —"

"I've seen the collection before, Theo," Paul Mathews said. "You remember."

Dietrich smiled. "And the Mantegna? You saw also the Mantegna then?"

"Yes, Theo," Mathews said. "And I didn't see anything wrong with it, and I didn't have a feeling."

"So," Dietrich said. "So."

The elevator doors parted with a soft whoosh. Without looking at the room behind him, Mathews turned off the lights and they went out of the darkness into the elevator and did not speak as they were carried slowly upward.

The administrative offices of the Washington Institute of Art were located on the fifth floor of a large graystone building at the corner of Q Street and Euclid. This old mansion had none of the flat Roman anonymity of the government buildings that were scattered around it, and it seemed oddly out of place in its setting. It had been built in the latter decades of the nineteenth century by a comparatively obscure but incomparably wealthy railroad and goldmining tycoon from San Francisco, who, in the early years of the twentieth century, out of a surfeit of wealth, a late discovery of the power to be felt through philanthropy, and a bitter and obscure displeasure with his family and progeny, had established the Institute, bequeathing to it the Washington mansion (in which he had lived, sporadically, for less than a dec-

ade), his meager collection of pre-impressionist 19th century French paintings, and the greater part of his fortune. In those years of inordinate and untaxed wealth, the endowment attracted more bequests; a depressed European art market after the first World War made possible a number of purchases from foreign dealers; private collections began to be given; and out of a combination of circumstance and reasonably good, if uninspired, management, it became within a few years a somewhat more than decent museum.

Theo Dietrich had come to the Institute shortly before the outbreak of World War II, early in the year 1939. In the weeks after Hitler's annexation of Austria, he managed to get out of Germany, where he had been, despite his youth, an assistant curator of Flemish painting at the Berlin Museum of Art. Barely able to speak English, he presented himself to the Institute with a letter from his old professor and mentor, Max Friedlander; more out of deference to Friedlander's name than the Institute's need, he was given a minor position as assistant curator. And by one of those accidents of fate that determine men's lives, two years later there appeared in an English translation by a London publisher a book that had, for obscure reasons, been suppressed in Berlin within weeks after its first publication — his monograph upon Hans Memling. It appeared unexpectedly, and caused a minor sensation even in the United States, since the translator had assumed that its author was one of the many intellectuals and professors who had disappeared under the Nazi regime. In the middle forties, despite a lingering anti-Germanic feeling that was general after the conclusion of the second World War, Dietrich was appointed Director of the Institute. Since that time, it had become one of the most distinguished smaller museums in the nation.

The freight elevator that they had taken in the basement holding room went only to the fourth floor, so they had to walk up the narrow stairway that led from the annex of the

Far East Room to the office area atop the exhibition rooms. By the time they got to his office, Dietrich was breathing heavily.

"You smoke too much, Theo," Mathews said.

Dietrich shrugged and went to the long table that he used as a desk. He looked sorrowfully at the piles of papers and books that covered the surface, and poked among them for several moments. Finally he discovered a crumpled package, removed from it a bent cigaret, which he lit and inhaled deeply. He waved in the general direction of a heavy arm-chair beside his desk, and Paul Mathews sat.

"You smoke too much," Mathews said again, "you dress like a tramp, and the few friends you have left have begun to remark upon your apparent withdrawal from the human race."

"I love you, too," Dietrich said, "and you're not even German."

"You're to come to dinner this Friday."

"Maybe next week," Dietrich said. "How is Ellen?"

"Ellen is fine," Mathews said, "and it is on her orders that you're coming. This Friday. Do you want me to get you a woman?"

"I would not dare," Dietrich said. "Ellen would be too jealous."

"This Friday, then," Mathews said, and Dietrich nodded.

They sat for several moments in that easy silence to which old friendship had accustomed them; but when Mathews murmured a sound that signified his intention to leave, and started to rise, Dietrich lifted a hand as if to stay his movement.

"Wait," he said. "A little business."

He removed his last cigaret and crumpled the empty package. He lit the cigaret and absently watched the smoke curl upward in the still room.

"You must understand," Dietrich said, "that there is a

certain delicacy involved. Not only with the exhibit, but with the entire collection. The Tyler collection." Dietrich emphasized the name, and paused. "It is the first time, you understand, that it has been shown to the public. And some of the paintings, many of them, have not been seen even by scholars for fifty, a hundred years."

"I know," Mathews said.

"And Wendell Tyler — "

"Wendell Tyler is eighty-two years old, mean as sin, probably crazy, and unlikely to undergo any radical transformation of character."

"Correct," Dietrich said. He leaned back in his chair and joined his fingertips precisely over his middle. "And he is — how does one say? — highly protective of his collection. For nearly thirty years, since he began it with the purchase of the d'Urbino paintings, it has remained buried away in Tyler's old house in Arlington. He has not even allowed photographs for books or magazines. In all that time, thirty, maybe fifty people, have seen it, and then only parts of it, and only a few hours at a time. Glimpses. Only glimpses for such a collection."

"I know," Mathews said.

"I saw it," Dietrich said, "because I am who I am; and you were allowed to see it, I believe, because of that little book you did on the Bellinis."

"I don't know why he let me see it," Mathews said.

Dietrich nodded. "It was the book. Tyler liked the little book. . . . So few people, and those paintings." He shook his head. "For them not to be seen."

"But they will be," Mathews said. "For six months, for a year if we're lucky, anyone who wants to can see them. That's something."

Dietrich smiled at him benignly, and nodded; but he did not speak. There was a long silence.

"All right, Theo," Mathews said at last. "I know that look. I'm not a mouse, and you're hardly a cat. What is it?"

Dietrich's smile broadened. "My little drama," he said. "You will not even give me my little drama. . . . All right. Except for Wendell Tyler and myself, Theo Dietrich — and now you — no one knows of this. If the exhibit goes well, if it pleases Tyler — the Institute will show the collection not for six months, or a year. No." He leaned forward in his chair. "It will be ours. All of it. In its entirety."

Such a possibility had crossed Paul Mathews's mind before; but it had done so as a fantasy might drift into a reverie, and then out again, pleasant as much because of its unreality as its possibility. And now the fact seemed more unreal than the fantasy.

"My God," he said; and then said inanely, "Are you sure?"

Dietrich smiled again. "And so you see, it is important that we proceed very carefully indeed. Nothing will go wrong, I am sure; but it will be better if we are careful. A loose word, a rumor that the collection is less than it is — "

"It's a great collection," Mathews said.

"It is certainly the greatest private collection in this country," Dietrich said, "and maybe one of the best in the world. And it is ours, yours. Almost all Quattrocento and early 16th century. It will be yours to work with, you understand. Therefore."

"Therefore I mustn't go off half-cocked," Mathews said. "Theo, I looked at that Mantegna for half an hour at the most, and under not very good conditions. I'll be working with the Tyler collection for the next six months, and I intend to work hard and do a good job. I've never made up my mind about anything in thirty minutes, and I don't intend to start now."

He heard a sharpness in his voice that he had not intended, and so he added more gently: "Don't worry. It'll be all right."

Dietrich sighed. "Of course, Paul. I know. I know you are careful." He rubbed his palm over his face and sighed

again. "I am getting old. I worry too much, and I forgot to shave this morning."

"Theo, I've known you for twenty years," Mathews said. "You've always worried too much, and you always forget to shave in the morning."

When Mathews left, Dietrich was smiling and still rubbing his face absently with his open palm.

In the passageway outside Dietrich's office, Mathews paused at the stairway that led to the exhibition halls and the elevator; for a moment he was tempted to go down again to the basement holding room where in its disarray the Tyler collection waited to be unpacked and viewed. There flickered across the eye of his mind the image of the Mantegna that he had looked at earlier in the morning, and the temptation became almost palpable. Then he shook his head. I will wait, he said to himself; there is no hurry. He went down the passageway toward his own office, opened the door of the small reception room, where Liz Trotter sat staring morosely across her desk.

"Good morning, Liz," Mathews said. She looked at him vacantly. He said: "Monday doldrums?"

"Weekends," she said. "They're hell."

She was a dark, slender woman in her late twenties, and she had been Mathews's assistant for nearly three years. For several months, he knew, she had been involved in a somewhat mysterious but clearly unsatisfactory love affair, of which he knew no details. He nodded sympathetically and murmured something inconsequential.

She roused herself from the lethargy in which Mathews had found her, and said: "Ellen called." She pushed a strand of dark hair under the bows of her horn-rimmed glasses. "I'm supposed to remind you to pick up the wine at the Chateau. And Larry Phillips called to say that he *could* have lunch today, and for you to meet him at one."

Mathews nodded. He looked at her more closely and saw

the dark smudges under her eyes. "You look awful," he said. "Why don't you take the day off? Drive out to the Bay, or — just take it easy. I can manage here."

She smiled feebly. "Thanks, Paul, but I'd rather keep busy. It's that kind of a day."

Unlike Dietrich's, Mathews's office was orderly and neatly kept. The surface of his long mahogany desk gleamed dully in the sunlight that slanted through the two east windows, which he faced when he entered the room. Ceiling high bookcases covered two adjacent walls of the room, at the entrance and to his right; near the left wall was a long sofa of black leather, a low table, and two chairs. Above the sofa, on the white wall, hung two drawings in sepia; they were small Tintoretos — "Without distinction, but charming," Theo had said of them. But they pleased Mathews. By rights, this should have been Theo's office; it had been occupied by all previous Directors of the Institute. But Dietrich had always preferred the plain disorder of the large room in which he had worked when he first came to the Institute; and when Mathews was made Senior Curator of Paintings, Dietrich had insisted that he have the office, which (he said) would otherwise go unused. The elegance of the room pleased Mathews, and he was wryly amused at the pleasure he took in it.

As he almost always did upon entering the room for the first time in the morning, he went to the east window and looked out over the city. It was early spring, but already the days were beginning to turn hot. In the distance the Monument gleamed in the sunlight, and the morning haze above the river had been burned away.

With a feeling of aimlessness that was not usual to him, he sat down at his desk and began to go through the neatly squared sheaf of notes and letters that Liz had placed there earlier in the morning. There was a note reminding him of the annual history of painting exhibit that many years ago he had organized for the area high school students, and had long since turned over to one or another of the younger staff

members; a letter from a small museum in Dayton requesting the loan of several paintings for a special exhibition; a memo from Liz Trotter reminding him of a Board of Trustees meeting the next week; a note from a magazine asking him to review a new book on the Florentine school; and several letters of inquiry on routine matters that could easily have been handled by someone else. It occurred to him that Liz Trotter must have been more upset than he realized; most of this correspondence could have been handled by one or another of half a dozen junior staff members, and Liz usually saw to it that it was so handled.

Then, quite suddenly, the image of the painting interposed itself between the papers on his desk top and his loosening vision; and it seemed to him as clear and detailed and steady as it had been in its earlier actuality. But he did not wish to see it now. He shut his eyes tightly and shook his head, so that the uninvited image that had appeared so unexpectedly might be expunged from his vision. He forced himself to think as simply and as baldly as he could.

Tempera on canvas, that fine linen canvas that only began to be used in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Approximately a metre and a half in height, two metres in length — limited palette, not grisaille, but as a grisaille might be if color were used. . . . Tradition had titled the painting “Peter at the Tomb of the Resurrected Christ,” and it was from the hand of Andrea Mantegna, that most accomplished of the Paduan school in the middle Quattrocento. It was one of the few inscribed Mantegnas that had survived the centuries; in the lower right hand corner, barely discernible, was the name in its Latin form: ANDREAS MANTINIA. A work of the late middle period, painted when Mantegna was in his forties or early fifties, at the height of his powers, and in the service of the Gonzagas, in Mantua. Beyond its intrinsic worth, the painting was important because it marked a transition from the Paduan school of Squarcione and Bellini to Mantegna’s later and (Mathews thought) too ornate style.

Now he closed his eyes, and let shimmer across the darkness that sort of image which is not so much image as impression of image; for he wished to recall the generalized characteristics of that tradition from which Mantegna had emerged and which he had perfected. He had a sense of massive rock given shape and violence by innumerable splittings; of paths and streams composed of swirling lines that led the eye to where it seemed to want to go; of bare tree trunks and limbs, rising from pebble-strewn foregrounds; of distant and sparsely vegetated hills that supported villages of closely set and somehow fantastic buildings; and of figures at once massive and elongated, as if wrested from tortured stone.

Almost casually, he let the "Peter at the Tomb" slip back into his vision, under his vision, so that it might emerge naturally and inevitably from his impression of the whole Paduan school; but the two would not merge. They remained separate, and then became indistinct, and were dissipated into the darkness. He shook his head again.

Of the more than two hundred works of Mantegna that the literature had recorded — frescoes, engravings, drawings, paintings — only a few more than sixty had survived the ravages of time and accident and the carelessness of man. The first major work, which was the foundation of a prestige so unquestioned that in later years he was able to command the assistance of the young Leonardo da Vinci in a variety of projects, was a series of frescoes on the walls of the Ovetari Chapel at Padua, painted when Mantegna was in his early twenties and still living in that city. Nearly five hundred years later, this chapel had been occupied by German troops for use as an artillery base, and subsequently destroyed by Allied bomber planes in the spring of 1944. Some years after the war, efforts were made to effect restoration, but the damage had been so extensive that the task seemed little more than a sad travesty upon that which it attempted to remedy. . . . And forty years after completing the Ovetari Chapel, Man-

tegrina had been summoned to the Vatican by Pope Innocent VIII, so that a chapel might be decorated with his frescoes; they were said to be the most impressive work that Mantegna had yet accomplished. Three hundred years later, another Pope, Pius VI, had had destroyed the chapel and the frescoes, so that space might be made for a workshop and storage room adjacent to a recently built Museum of Antiquities, which contained trinkets, copies of Roman sculptures, second rate statuary, and a large number of forgeries.

A feeling of helplessness came over Paul Mathews, as he sat alone in his office on the fifth floor of the Washington Institute of Art on a bright morning in early spring. It was a feeling that he had had before, but seldom had it come upon him with such intensity; he thought of what time and man and the accidents of history had done, and would do, despite whatever efforts he and others like him might raise against the tides of destruction. In time, all the Mantegnas, the Titiens, the Michelangelos, the Raphaels would, like living flesh, wither and dry and return to the elements of which they had been composed. It seemed to him at that moment that his curacy was a vain and futile undertaking, a fruitless action against that which could not be stayed.

. . . It was a feeling very much like the one he had had more than twenty years before, during his and Ellen's first trip to Europe in the year of his fellowship, after he had completed his graduate work at the University of California. They had taken the train from Venice to Padua, intending to stop there briefly before they went on to Mantua and Milan, and thence to Florence and Rome and Naples. But in Padua he had gone to the site of the Church of Eremitani, of which the Ovetari Chapel had been a part; he had heard that the Church and Chapel had been damaged in the war, but he had not been aware of the extent of the damage. Little of the Church remained; a few broken walls in the isolation of the sun suggested what had been the plan of the Church, but he could not even be sure of the location of the Chapel, so thor-

ough had been the destruction. He had seen reproductions of the frescoes, of course; but they were said to be no more than vague suggestions of what had been actual. As he stood in the bare space of the ruined churchyard, the realization came upon him that no one would ever again see that monumental work, and that the frescoes would die forever with the last person who had seen them. He felt a lonely helplessness of spirit that had little to do with what he perceived to be his own loss. He thought of the world in which all mankind so precariously lived, and would live.

Later, in Mantua, he saw the frescoes of the Stanza degli Spozi in the Gonzaga Castle, where Mantegna had worked for so many years; and he found himself saddened again, though the devastation there was more of time than man. The paint on the plaster walls had faded and flaked away, and an ancient moisture had so mottled the surfaces that it seemed that the members of the Gonzaga family, which the frescoes celebrated, suffered from some slow and suspended disease for which there could be no remedy.

Not far from the ducal castle were the ruins of Mantegna's home. Except for a sleepy guard, who looked at him indifferently, the place was deserted; Mathews wandered among the broken walls of the home, and stood at last in its circular courtyard. He tried to imagine the life that had once been lived there. It was said that in Mantegna's time the walls had been covered by frescoes and paintings done by himself and his sons, and that the rooms had contained one of the most distinguished collections of antiquities in Northern Italy, many of which Mantegna had had to sell during the last sad years of his long life, when the Gonzagas abandoned him to his age and sickness.

Adjacent to the ruins of Mantegna's home was the Chapel of St. Andrea, where the remains of the painter had been placed by his sons, some four hundred and fifty years before; though it was late afternoon, and he knew that Ellen would be waiting for him in their little pensione in the center

of the city, Mathews decided to walk to the Chapel.

And it was there that he first saw the face.

At the entrance of the Chapel, upon a massive pedestal and encircled by a wreath of carven marble, was the great bronze bust, the self-portrait that his grandson had placed there some fifty years after his death. Mathews stared at the bust for a long time, as if he were studying it. But he could not see it as he had been trained to do. There was such fierceness and energy there, in the heavy jaw and the stern mouth and glaring eyes (the drilled sockets of which were said to have once contained diamonds), that he could see it only as the corroded ghost of an austere and accusing presence, who looked across the centuries with a fierce indignation at what time and man had wrought upon his work and his memory.

And now, some twenty years later, Paul Mathews saw that face again. It was the bronze vision of a man dead more than four and a half centuries, and it came back to him with a force that he could not have foreseen. He felt the ancient accusation of those eyes, as if they were a presence in the room where he quietly sat.

He shook his head sharply, closed his eyes again, opened them, and then was on his feet, walking toward the door before he realized he had made his decision. Liz was at her desk desultorily thumbing through a sheaf of papers; her full underlip was caught between her even white teeth.

"Liz," he said more sharply than he had intended, "get me copies of everything Theo has on the Tyler collection. And anything else you can turn up on your own." He heard too much urgency in his voice. He smiled. "Don't worry. It's all right. I'll talk to Theo about it later."

She looked at him with some surprise and puzzlement. "Is there anything wrong, Paul?"

"No," he said. "I just want to get started as soon as I can. It's going to be a big job."

"I'll get on it right away," she said; and it seemed to Mathews that she became almost at once less morose. He went

back into his office and began making notes for letters that he would record for the stenographer later in the afternoon. He told himself that he would not think of the Mantegna again that morning.

A few minutes after eleven o'clock, Liz Trotter opened his door, closed it, and said, somewhat distractedly, "Paul, there's someone outside to see you."

Mathews looked up. "Who is it?"

"He wouldn't give me his name. He says he's an old friend."

"The last thing I need this morning," Mathews said, "is an old friend who won't give his name. Any clues?"

She shrugged. "He doesn't look like the museum type. A little older than you — medium height." She hesitated. "He looks a little — seedy."

"All my old friends seem to look a little seedy," Mathews said. "Send him in."

He did, indeed, Mathews thought during the first few moments that the man stood in the doorway, look a little seedy. His thinning mouse-gray hair was parted on the side and looked uncombed, a gray plaid suit bagged at the shoulders and knees, the collar of his blue shirt curled at the points, and his black shoes were scuffed. His face was rather heavy and loose, and it had upon it a fixed and expectant smile, a face that was waiting to be recognized.

Mathews smiled back and shrugged ruefully.

"Paul," the man said with a kind of empty heartiness. He came forward a few steps. "Paul Mathews. I'd recognize you, even if I just bumped into you on the street."

Something as flickering and tentative as a moth's wing touched the back of Mathews's memory — and then it was gone. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm really very sorry, but I just can't —"

"Parker. Dave Parker!" the man said loudly, smiling

still; he came forward a few more steps.

"Parker," Mathews repeated blankly.

The man stopped, and the smile fell from his face. For a moment, Mathews was afraid that he was going to weep. The man said sorrowfully, almost in resignation: "Captain Parker. The Army. I guess I've changed a lot, over the years."

An instant of rage, the strength of which he could not have foreseen, rose in Mathews's chest and gathered behind his eyes, blurring his vision and causing his hands to tremble; and as inexplicably as it had risen, it subsided. Before he had time to wonder at its coming and going, he heard himself say, "My God! Parker. Captain — Parker," and felt himself come up from his chair and go toward the man whose smile had returned and who walked to meet him, his right hand thrust out eagerly. They shook hands and looked at each other as if they were not strangers. With his free hand, Mathews motioned toward the sofa and chairs; they sat down.

"Well, well, well," Parker said. "It's been a long time."

"Yes," Mathews said.

"Thirty years," Parker said, "this fall."

They sat for several moments in silence, smiling vaguely, their eyes not quite meeting. Mathews tried to make his mind go blank, concentrating simply upon the face that was like an apparition before him.

"Chabua," Parker was saying. "The base hospital in Chabua, just before they shipped you home." He shook his head wonderingly. "Thirty years this coming October."

"That long," Mathews said mechanically. He became aware of his effort to maintain the inanity of the conversation.

"Do you ever see any of the guys in the outfit, or get in touch, or write?"

"No," Mathews said quickly. And then he said more casually, "You lose touch; you know how it is."

"Yeah," Parker said. "I just thought, your living in Washington and all — Lots of the guys in the old outfit

wound up here, you know. I just thought maybe you might have run into some of them.”

“I didn’t come here until almost ten years after the war,” Mathews said. “And those who came to Washington would probably have been officers. Remember, I was just a private; you were the only one of the officers I ever really knew.”

“Oh, sure,” Parker said, and waved his hand. “That rank business. Officers, enlisted men. It seems kind of silly, once it’s all over.” He looked at Mathews gravely. “Call me Dave,” he said.

Mathews started to smile; and then he did not. “Dave,” he said seriously.

They had not been friends; at the most they had been acquaintances, and rather distant ones. As they talked, Mathews tried to recreate from the image of the man who sat rather nervously before him now, the lineaments of the Parker who had been his superior officer thirty years before. He thought he remembered him as having been taller, less heavy; the almost fawning uncertainty he saw now had been an easy arrogance then; and he realized with an uncomfortable surprise that he had not really liked Parker when he had known him. But now he felt something like a friendly compassion for the aging man who sat before him twisting his nicotine stained fingers and grimacing with what he must have thought were smiles.

“ — and when I saw your name in the paper,” Parker was saying, “I thought to myself, it couldn’t be *that* Paul Mathews. But there your picture was, and — ”

“My picture?” Mathews asked.

“Yeah, in the paper.”

Mathews nodded, remembering that there had been a feature in a recent Sunday supplement about the Institute.

“And I said to myself, you’ve got to drop by and see old Paul, give him a big surprise.” He looked at Mathews wistfully. “It’s funny how in the Army you think you know one of your men, and then you find out that all you know is what

you had to know. . . . I knew you seemed better educated than most of the enlisted men, but I never knew you were — well, artistic.”

The word, Mathews thought, ought to have sounded incongruous coming from Parker, but it did not. He smiled.

“Neither did I, if I was,” he said. “That came after.”

Parker nodded. “Lots of things come after, in a war. . . . A curator, the paper said.” He shook his head. “What the hell does a curator do, anyway?”

“A little of everything,” Mathews said. “Arrange exhibits, advise the directors about acquisitions, give lectures now and then, write catalogs, essays, even books, maybe. Sort of a combination handyman and professor. But you’re really a kind of scholar, or ought to be. You study, travel a bit to other museums. I get to Europe every year or so for a few weeks.”

“It sounds like a good life,” Parker said.

“It is,” Mathews said. “It’s a better life than I hoped for.”

“Yeah,” Parker said. “You got married, I guess.”

Mathews nodded.

“That girl you were engaged to back in the Army that you used to write to all the time?”

Mathews was surprised that Parker knew of that, but then he realized that Parker must have been one of those who censored the mail. “No,” he said. “That didn’t work out.” He smiled, and for what reason he did not know, said: “But I married her sister.”

“Her sister,” Parker said soberly, nodding as if he understood. “You never can tell how things are going to work out. You got a family, I guess?”

“No,” Mathews said. “We never had children.”

“That’s too bad,” Parker said, and then said quickly: “Or maybe not.”

“That’s all right,” Mathews said. He felt an obscure discomfort in explaining. “We never felt we needed them.”

There was a silence.

“Europe,” Parker said. “I never got to Europe. Can you imagine that? I’ve been nearly everywhere else, but not Europe. I stayed in the Army, you know, for a couple of years after the war. I was just about to make Major, but — well, I got out. Oh, I’ve kept up my reserve commission and all that, but the peacetime army just wasn’t for me. So I went into other things.”

Parker leaned back on the sofa and looked at Mathews; and for a moment his eyes seemed shrewd and hard and knowing. Then he blinked, and said gently:

“A lot of the fellows who had been in the OSS did that. We kept our — connections — but we weren’t really in the Army. You know what I mean.”

Mathews did not know what he meant, but he nodded.

And then Parker said, somewhat surprisingly and with an edge of intensity: “I’ve always been a patriot, you know. Always.”

Mathews nodded, and looked away from him in embarrassment.

“So I’ve been all over, you might say. But never to Europe. All over Southeast Asia — Rangoon, Singapore, Tokyo, Saigon, Hanoi — before the Viet Nam war, of course — Thailand, Malaysia. You name it. Last ten or fifteen years, though, I’ve been mainly in South America and Mexico.” He shook his head vigorously, and that note of empty heartiness came back into his voice. “That’s where the action is. If you know the lingo, and have the savvy, and make a few connections, you can do all right for yourself down there.”

Mathews nodded, feeling an obscure sorrow for the man before him who again seemed so oddly pathetic and defenseless.

“So you might say I’ve done all right for myself too. No complaints. But I never got to Europe, never made any connections there.” His voice trailed away, and then he laughed abruptly. “Do you know today is the first time in fifteen, maybe twenty years that I’ve even been inside a museum? I

guess you miss a lot if you're away, and if you get too busy."

For a moment, Mathews had an irrational impulse to offer to show Parker through the Institute, as if that might assuage what had happened to him over the years. He asked quietly, "Are you still connected in South America — or Mexico?"

Parker waved his hand in a gesture of abandonment. "Oh, I've given it all up. You might say I've retired." He laughed abruptly, and then said: "A man can work for just so long, and then — no, I'm back to stay, I guess. Got here in Washington around the first of the year. Just getting my bearings, tying up some loose ends, waiting around until everything's settled. These things take time."

"You were in business?" Mathews asked.

"A little of everything," Parker said. "You know. Import, export. Lots of American firms need men who know their way around down there, lots of Latin American firms need representatives who have their connections in the U.S. I owned a couple of businesses — Once in Bolivia, I had over a hundred employees. Small electronics, appliances, things like that. We'd import parts, assemble them there, and sell them under our own brand name. Of course, it had to be a Bolivian's name, but it was really mine. . . . I sold out. I mean, the market was limited. We couldn't grow."

"Yes," Mathews said. Most desperately, he wished now that Parker would stop. He remembered the rather vain and flamboyant man of thirty years before, whom he had vaguely disliked; and he tried now to find him in this somehow bravely abject ghost, for whom he was beginning to have a compassion that was much like friendship. But he could not find him there. He wondered at time and at change.

He became aware that a silence had grown between them. He looked up at Parker and started to speak, but he did not; Parker's eyes were upon him with an intensity so concentrated and singular that for a moment he was almost afraid, though he did not know of what.

"Look," Parker said. "I want to talk to you some more." He paused. His eyes did not waver. "I *need* to talk to you some more. But not here. Can you have lunch?"

"Oh, God," Mathews said, and looked at his watch. It was ten minutes before one. "I almost forgot. Look, I'm sorry — Dave. I have to meet someone for lunch today, and it's too late now to — Look, we'll have to get together. Why don't you leave your number with me, and I'll call you later in the week, and we can —"

"This is Monday," Parker said. "How about tomorrow? Or Wednesday." His eyes flicked away from Mathews, and the dull haze settled over them again as he smiled emptily. "Hell, a couple of old Army buddies must have a lot of fat to chew, and you can't do that without a drink or two under your belt."

"Wednesday, then," Mathews said; he tried to keep the resignation out of his voice. "I think Wednesday will be all right. Let me give you a ring Wednesday morning."

"I'll call you," Parker said. "I'm just getting settled in a new place, and the phone company — you know how slow they are."

Mathews nodded. He knew that Parker would call. He glanced at his watch again, but Parker remained for a moment longer on the sofa, looking at him vacantly. Then he said, in a very quiet voice:

"It's good to see you again, Paul."

Then he got up and straightened his shoulders and with what seemed to Mathews almost a parody of an old jauntiness walked toward the door. Mathews followed a few steps behind him. At the door they shook hands; and with his hand on the doorknob, looking sideways at Mathews, Parker said:

"Do you remember the last time we saw each other, in that hospital at Chabua?"

The memory was so dim that it had no meaning to Mathews, but he nodded.

"I never let on," Parker said, "but I almost didn't recog-

nize you. My god, you were in bad shape; you looked awful. I never thought you'd make it."

Mathews did not speak.

"And look at you now. You came through it all right." He looked at Mathews quizzically. "I guess we both did." It was almost a question.

Parker smiled once more, opened the door, and closed it softly behind him.

He was late for his luncheon appointment with Larry Phillips, but he knew that Phillips would be there, and waiting, for Phillips was a punctual man. He had said once that he did not dislike unpunctuality in others, but he disliked it in himself. Mathews stood for a few moments in the dark foyer of the restaurant, blinking his eyes, trying to rid them of the early afternoon glare out of which he had walked.

For the past several years, he and Phillips had got the habit of lunching together whenever Phillips's affairs brought him into the city or when there was a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Institute, of which he was a member. He was some eight years younger than Mathews, in his middle forties, and he was a millionaire. That was a fact of which Mathews sometimes thought with a mild astonishment.

When he was in his late twenties, Phillips had begun as a practising psychiatrist in Washington, and within a few years had become moderately successful. When he was thirty, he received an inheritance of some fifteen thousand dollars from an aunt whom he had barely known; and because he felt no need of the money, he began, in a small way, to speculate in real estate. At that time, the money seemed to him almost a bother, and it would not have mattered to him to lose it. The first land he bought — five acres of scrubby river frontage near Annapolis — quadrupled in value within three months of its purchase. He re-invested his profit in a smaller tract of land near Georgetown, and within three weeks doubled his investment.

"Jesus Christ," he told Mathews once. "I just couldn't go wrong. If I'd wanted to make money, I would probably have busted my ass; but I didn't give a damn, not really. I had my practice, and — I used to test my luck out, just for fun. I once bought a thousand dollars worth of uranium stock at ten cents a share. Strictly sucker stuff, and I knew it. Six, seven weeks later it was worth five dollars a share. And that's the way it went. I couldn't lose."

His speculations had taken little of his time, and he continued his practice. In his early thirties, he married, and was divorced within two years. "I figured a shrink ought to be married; most of the people he tries to fuck up are." And he had also told Mathews that that was the only gamble he had made during that period which had not paid off. "She was a nice girl. I think all that money, coming in so easy, spooked her. She once said she thought it was sinister. That's the word she used. Sinister."

By the time he was thirty-five, he had more than three million dollars; a year later his wealth was such that it would thereafter accrue substantially without even minimal activity on his own part. "Shit," he had said to Mathews. "I was paying my goddam tax lawyer more than I was making as a shrink." He quit his psychiatric practice, and moved from Washington into a large but relatively modest apartment in Georgetown. "I figured I'd missed my calling, if it was so hard to help people and so easy to make money. Besides, talking to all those crazies, week after week — it was depressing."

Shortly after he quit his practice, he was elected to the Board of Trustees of the Washington Institute of Art, and he and Mathews became acquainted. Mathews was refreshed by his determined informality, amused by his cheerful vulgarity, and puzzled by his dogged responsibility to his duties. He discovered within these qualities of appearance intelligence, discrimination, and taste. They became friends.

They became friends, Mathews thought, during a meet-

ing of the Board of Trustees that had become particularly aimless and contentious. A young assistant curator of Decorative Art had proposed a large acquisition which Theo Dietrich opposed; a Board member defended the proposal at great length and with little cogency, speaking of cultural diversity and anthropological overview and indeterminacy of value. At last Phillips said quietly: "I'm with Theo. To hell with snuffboxes and walking sticks and eighteenth century footstools. Culture? Fuck culture. What I want to see in this museum are some more good paintings."

When his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, Mathews looked toward the corner where he and Phillips usually sat. Phillips was there, as he had known he would be, patiently smoking a cigaret. He had begun to let his hair grow in the current fashion, a little long; the curled ends above his collar caught the faint yellow light from the candles on the table. Phillips was stockily built, of medium height, and his face, which was still unlined, had begun to go heavy.

Mathews heard his name murmured; a waiter had appeared at his side. He nodded, and the waiter led him through a maze of tables.

"Glad you could make it," Phillips said dryly.

"Sorry," Mathews said. "It was one of these mornings."

Phillips nodded. "I heard that the Tyler collection came in over the weekend."

"It was that, and — Look, I need a drink. Have you had one?"

Phillips shook his head, beckoned, and a waiter came up to them. They ordered drinks, and consoled themselves with small talk until their glasses were set before them. They sipped.

"Have you had a chance to look at it yet?" Phillips asked.

"What?" Mathews looked at him blankly.

"The Tyler collection. Have you seen it yet?"

"Not really." Mathews shook his head. "It isn't even un-

crated, I glanced at the Mantegna — ” he hesitated. “But that isn’t what held me up.”

Phillips nodded, waited, and Mathews told him about the ghost who had come to him out of a past he had not thought of for many years; and as he listened to his own words, it seemed to him that what he said was ordinary and dull, and he could not understand the agitation that returned to him, even now.

“It was just that he was so damned pitiful,” he said at last, as if trying to explain it to himself. “I never liked him, really; I’m not sure that I like him even now. But to see a man who was so sure of himself, so full of himself — to become empty, to have nothing inside, and not even to know it. . . .”

“Yes,” Phillips said. “I saw them all the time, when I was practising. You get used to it after a while.”

“Did *you* get used to it?” Mathews asked.

“No,” Phillips said abruptly. “That’s why I gave up. Once you start feeling that way, you’re a lousy shrink.” He drained his scotch and water and said: “I don’t usually drink in the afternoon.”

“Another?” Mathews asked. Phillips nodded and beckoned to a waiter; they ordered drinks and lunch.

“How’s Theo?” Phillips asked. “I haven’t seen him since the last Board meeting.”

“Same old Theo. He keeps saying he’s getting old, so you know he’s all right.”

“I love the old bastard,” Phillips said.

“Yes.” Mathews idly ran a forefinger up and down the side of his glass. “He made the Institute, you know. Without him, it would still be a second rate operation. Good, but decidedly second rate.”

“Do you think it’s first rate now?”

“Not quite,” Mathews said carefully, “not at the moment. But with the Tyler collection — ”

Phillips waved his hand. “That’s temporary. Six months,

a year at the outside. It'll get *Post* space but it won't make any real difference."

"Theo says it's going to be better than that."

Phillips looked at him steadily for a moment. "What's going on?"

"Don't mention it to anyone," Mathews said, "but Theo says that if the exhibition goes well, we'll get the whole thing."

"Well, I'll be damned," Phillips said softly. And then he leaned back in his chair and laughed, and continued to laugh. "That Theo. That sly old son of a bitch. Do you want to know something?"

Mathews smiled and shrugged.

"I wasn't going to say anything about this," Phillips said, "because I didn't want it to get back to Theo. I wanted him to have all the credit. But now that he's pulled *this* off —"

Phillips lit another cigaret and hunched forward over the table. "A couple of years ago, a niece of old Tyler's called me up. When I was still in practice, I'd treated a friend of hers, and I guess maybe she was under the impression that I'd done her some good. It seems the old man had been having fits of depression, wouldn't talk, wouldn't come out of the house, things like that. And I said what the hell, sure, I'd go over and see him. I guess I had the collection in the back of my mind even then; at the least, I wanted to be able to see it myself.

"So I talked to the old man, went over there every week or so for nearly a year. Nothing wrong with him, really. Crazy as hell, but nothing *wrong* with him. Just lonely, getting old, a little afraid. Seems that he had decided about twenty years ago that people were boring, and that he'd rather just be with his collection. So he locked himself up in that goddam sixty-room mausoleum of his; wouldn't see anybody except his cook, one man-servant, and his dealer — what's his name?"

"Stern," Mathews said. "Bruno Stern."

"That's right. Well, Stern would come down from New York a couple of times a year to show Tyler what he'd found for him, and as often as not Tyler would buy. I got the feeling that he bought as much to make sure that Stern came back as to add to his collection."

Mathews shook his head in disbelief. "He didn't see *anyone* except them?"

"Did you see *him* when you looked at the collection?"

"No," Mathews said. "Bruno Stern arranged it. It was just Bruno, and me, and some man that looked like an undertaker, following us around."

"That would be Newton," Phillips said, "his servant, or manager, or nurse, or whatever you'd call him. . . . No, Tyler would call this niece I mentioned — four o'clock in the afternoon, first day of every month. And maybe he'd call a few other people, I don't know. Newton took care of everything else. And he saw me, like he saw Stern — I guess because he thought he had a reason." He paused, and added thoughtfully: "It was six months before he let me see the collection."

"You saw it?" Mathews said. "You never told me." It did not seem possible to him that one could see such a collection and not speak of it.

"That's right," Phillips said. He crushed out his cigaret and lit another. "Because that's when I got my plan." He took a deep drag on his cigaret and exhaled toward the ceiling.

"You smoke too much," Mathews said, and remembered that he had said the same thing to Theo earlier in the day.

Phillips nodded. "How else could I see whether I'm breathing or not?"

Mathews smiled. "You had a plan."

"I had a plan," Phillips said, and paused. "Let me tell you a secret, Paul. If you can make it a game, and are not involved yourself, and push the right buttons at the right time,

you can make almost anybody do almost anything. Especially if when you push the button they can be persuaded it was their own idea to do whatever it was you wanted them to do."

Mathews did not believe him. "Sure," he said.

Phillips smiled. "Not you, of course. You don't need anything, and you're my friend."

"Your plan," Mathews said.

"Nothing to it. He finally let me see the collection, and I kept asking him why he felt so much better. He didn't really feel much better, you know; but I kept after him, and pretty soon he thought he did; and then he did. Anyhow, he finally came to the conclusion that the collection represented himself, and that by hiding the collection he was hiding himself, and after that it was easy. I let him find out that I was on the Board of Trustees of the Institute, he asked me if we would be interested in a loan of the collection, I dropped Theo's name, and that was that. Completely unethical," he said cheerfully. "But the funny thing is, it *did* do the old guy some good. He started taking walks around the grounds, and he even asked his niece to come visit him."

"You make it sound simple," Mathews said. "Every decent museum in the country has been trying to get at that collection; some would even have paid for it."

"Their mistake," Phillips said, "was in wanting the collection. I made Tyler think we wanted him."

"Maybe we did, in a way."

"Sure we did. There's always some truth in anything. . . . But that Theo — he must have done some job on old Tyler."

A sudden apprehension came over Mathews. "You said Tyler was a little — "

"Crazy?"

"Yes," Mathews said. "Do you think we can count on him? Is he likely to change his mind?"

"Not a chance," Phillips said. "He may be a little nuts, but he's stubborn. It took him twenty years to back down on

his decision to lock himself up with his collection, and it would take him at least that long to back down on this one, as long as he's pleased about the way things go. He knows your work, and he knows you're going to be in charge of the showing, and he likes that. So I think we have ourselves a collection. But that Theo." He shook his head admiringly. "He pushes buttons better than I do."

"He was probably just being Theo," Mathews said.

Their coffee came, and they sat in silence for a few moments.

Mathews said: "He's coming out for dinner this Friday. Why don't you join us?"

"Sure," Phillips said. "I haven't seen Theo in a long time. We'll all get drunk and talk dirty."

"Fine," Mathews said. "Ellen will call you."

He leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath. He thought of the Tyler collection, and he thought of David Parker, and he thought of his earlier disquiet and agitation; and then, resolutely, he put them out of his mind. He watched the smoke from Phillips's cigaret spiral upward in the dimness of the room, and watched it disappear in the darkness.

He had nosed the car to his right and committed himself to the line of traffic that had begun to slow before its entrance to the freeway when he realized that he had forgotten to pick up the case of wine that Ellen had called about earlier in the day. He frowned at himself in annoyance. He was a meticulous man, and he seldom forgot things.

He slipped into the freeway and adjusted his speed to that of the homeward traffic around him. Within a few minutes the raw new buildings that straggled out from the environs of the city began to thin, giving way to the forest which the freeway had not yet overwhelmed nor even diminished. Ordinarily, he took pleasure in the drive; but today he had left the office late, and the five o'clock commuter traffic clogged the lanes and cars jockeyed for position in frenzies of

unrequited haste. The trees rushed by him in an incomprehensible blur, and he found that his hands were clenching the steering wheel so tightly that they had begun to ache. He forced himself to relax, and he tried to make his mind go empty.

He almost missed his exit, and had to brake so abruptly that his tires squealed on the hot pavement. Suddenly he felt very eager to be home.

His house lay in a cul-de-sac at the end of a short gravelled lane just off the road into Arlington. It was a single story house of modest proportions, and he and Ellen had bought it during their first years in Washington, before the area near Arlington had become fashionable. The house had been un-lived in for several years, and it was in a state of such apparent disrepair that it would have seemed to most prospective purchasers to be uninhabitable; but it was remote from other houses, Ellen thought that it could be made liveable for a few years, and it was what they could afford at the time. So they repainted and refinished and repaired, and somewhere in the course of their work and planning, they discovered the surprise of ownership. The house had become theirs, and now Mathews could not imagine living anywhere else. Over the years the area around them had been built up with large and rather grand houses; but the woods were heavy, and the Mathews house was so situated, at the declivity of a rather steep wooded hill, that they were hardly aware of the encroachment of the new houses or the presence of their neighbors.

The lane curved a little, and Mathews craned his neck to one side and saw through the trees a flash of yellow; it was Ellen's little Fiat, which they had bought five years before, and used in their tour of Italy. He pulled into the circular driveway, parked behind Ellen's car, and went into the house.

In the long dim living room he breathed deeply once, twice — and felt almost instantly a lessening of the obscure and unaccustomed tension that had come over him earlier in

the day. Ellen was not there. He started to call, but he did not. He went back to the foyer and down the hall, past his study, past their bedroom, past Ellen's little reading room and office, to the glassed in sun porch that stretched the width of the house. Ellen was there; she had not heard him come in. He stood for a moment in the doorway and looked at his wife with a kind of surprise that had become habitual and of which he sometimes was but vaguely aware.

She sat on a deck chair obliquely turned toward the southwest window so that the late sunlight, dispersed by the branches and new leaves of the backyard trees, flickered upon her face, softening the lines that had begun to appear there during the past few years, and glinting upon a few gray strands in the light russet hair. Her eyes were half-closed, and there was the suggestion of a smile on her rather full lips; her legs were extended, her ankles crossed, and her head rested lightly against the back of the chair. She would, Mathews realized almost with astonishment, be fifty years old next February; her body was almost that of a girl, firm and slender.

He stood unmoving for a moment more, and then he took a step forward, greeting her.

She turned her head to him without moving her body; the smile deepened, and she said with a tone of mild inquiry: "You're home late."

She had extended her arm toward him; he squeezed her hand briefly. "And I forgot the wine."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "We have enough for a few days. . . . You look tired."

He removed his suit jacket, hung it carefully on the back of the deck chair adjacent to Ellen's, and sat down. "An odd day," he said. "I had lunch with Larry Phillips, and —"

"How's Larry?" she asked.

"All right. I had lunch with Larry, and a couple of drinks, which I don't usually do on a working day — and I think I would like another now. You?"

She smiled and patted his hand. "I'll get them," she said. "Sit still."

He loosened his tie, unbuttoned the top button of his shirt, and lay back on the deck chair. He crossed his ankles and as he did so he looked at his shoes, the high polish of which gleamed dully in the lessening afternoon sunlight. He thought of the scuffed and cracking leather that he had seen on David Parker's feet earlier in the day, of the gray stockings that had gathered in rumples above the shoetops. It was a trivial thing to remember, he knew; but it occasioned an odd sadness in him, as if he had seen a lost and weather beaten toy on the roadside. He swung his legs to the floor and sat up on the deck chair and looked at the shadows cast by the trees, until Ellen came in with their drinks and set them on the low round wicker table between the chairs.

He had it in mind to take a few sips of his bourbon and water and then to tell Ellen of his morning, so that he might discover why it had seemed so strange to him. But he did not speak. He drank slowly, smiled absently at Ellen, and watched the darkness come in from the woods outside. Ellen looked at him with an expression that seemed to him almost apprehensive.

At last she shrugged lightly, and said; "Did you talk to Theo about dinner?"

"Friday. Is that all right?" She nodded. "And Larry Phillips said that he'd come too."

"Good," she said. "It'll be a nice party."

"Do you want to ask someone for Larry?"

"No," she said, "I've given up on that. Let's just keep it small."

They discussed whom else they might ask. Ellen wondered if Liz Trotter would come, and Mathews shrugged. He finished his drink, stared for a moment at the melting ice cubes in the bottom of his glass, and looked inquiringly at Ellen. She smiled, and said "Why not?"

He took her glass and went into the kitchen and made

their drinks, replenishing the ice bucket and refilling the ice cube trays. He considered laying out a tray of cheese and crackers, but he decided not to. By the time he got back to the porch, it was almost dark, but he did not turn on the light. They drank slowly, in near silence, murmuring occasionally to each other comfortable and inconsequential words. And still he did not speak of his morning.

He had a third drink while Ellen garnished the salmon she had poached and glazed earlier in the day. He should, he knew, have felt relaxed and somewhat expansive after the drinks he had had, but he did not. A vague anxiety moved through him, and he could not rid himself of it. He selected one of the two remaining bottles of Reisling from the refrigerator and uncorked it. He finished his drink, considered having a quick fourth one, and decided that it would be useless. He took the wine to the dining room, lit the candles without turning on the lights, and poured himself a glass. He sipped, and nodded to himself.

They ate slowly. He asked Ellen if she had gone in to work today, and she said that she had not. She was a part time archivist for the Maryland State Historical Society, and two or three times a week she went into the offices in Georgetown. They spoke of their plans for the summer; they decided not to go abroad that year, but to spend a month on Cape Cod, where Larry Phillips had a house that he never used and which was always at their disposal. They talked about Liz Trotter's unhappiness, and wondered how it would work out.

They finished the wine; and while Ellen cleared the dishes from the table, Mathews locked the doors. Thought it was barely ten o'clock, they decided that it was a night to go to bed early.

While Ellen brushed her teeth, Paul Mathews undressed, hung his clothes in the closet, put on his dark green robe, belted it, closing the lapels as tightly as he could about his upper chest and throat. He sat on the edge of their bed,

legs crossed, and waited for Ellen to come out of the bathroom.

As always, she undressed slowly with a little smile on her face, folding her things in a neat pile on the dressing table chair; then, naked, she stood sideways to the mirror; and as she had begun doing the past few years, took a deep breath and looked quizzically and impersonally at the reflection of her breasts, her belly, and at the line where her buttocks met her thighs. She looked at her body unselfconsciously and impersonally, turning one way and another; the light on the table caught here reddish-blond pubic hairs, so that they glowed in the dimness of the room. And as always, Paul Mathews felt the familiar warmth of an old and accustomed sensuality come over him. He realized suddenly that she had spoken to him, and that he had not heard what she said. He looked up at her blankly.

"Paul," she said, and there was a note of concern in her voice. "What's wrong? You've been like this all evening."

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's just that —"

He did not continue for a moment. Ellen had come up to stand before him, stooping a little, with a hand lightly touching his face. He stroked her thigh, almost absently, and then he was telling her about his day, about the Tyler collection and about the Mantegna and his feeling of disquiet and uncertainty when he saw it, and about the man who called himself David Parker, whose sudden appearance had unsettled him in ways that he could not have foreseen.

Ellen had put on a robe and was sitting beside him. She touched his arm. "Damn it," she said with soft anger. "I'm sorry. After all these years, to have it all brought up again. I thought —"

"Yes," he said. "But it wasn't *that* so much. It was remembering Parker, how he was then and how he was today. Did I ever tell you much about Parker?"

"No," she said. "You never did."

He nodded. He had talked to her very little about those

days. "It wasn't just that he was older; we're all older. It was almost as if he were someone else, impersonating someone who once had been. That's crazy, of course; it was Parker. But after that feeling about the Mantegna, and then to have Parker —" He paused, aware that he had become barely coherent.

"It's all right" she said. "Come to bed. It'll be all right in the morning."

Suddenly he was very tired. He nodded. He took off his robe, Ellen got into bed and turned off the light, and he put his arm around her, cupping her breast in his left hand, pulling her toward him so that their bodies touched and curved into each other. He thought of the Montegna again, and he thought of David Parker, and just before he fell asleep he heard himself mutter:

"There's something wrong with both of them!"

He awoke in darkness with a suddenness and finality that told him at once he would not be able to go back to sleep. He lay quietly for a moment; Ellen's breathing was deep and regular, so he knew that he had not disturbed her by the sudden start with which he had awakened. Folding back the covers, he eased his legs over the side of the bed, fumbled for his robe and slippers, blinking rapidly against the darkness. He shuffled across the room, eased the bedroom door open, and made his way to the kitchen. He switched a small light on, and as quietly as he could, started a pot of coffee. He stood in the kitchen until the coffee was brewed, and then he unplugged the pot and got a cup from the cupboard and groped his way toward the glassed in back porch where he and Ellen had sat together earlier. Until his eyes were accustomed to the darkness, he stood unmoving. He poured a cup of coffee, eased the pot onto the wicker table, sat in the chair beside the table, and sipped his coffee. He looked at the dark window, at the darker mass of trees beyond the window, and tried to think of nothing. He tried

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to make his mind empty as he sat in his chair at five o'clock in the morning and waited for the first light to come out of the darkness.