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Edited and with an Introduction
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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON • NEW YORK 2003

his wallet, fifty-dollar bills, a one-hundred-dollar bill, folded them discreetly over, and placed them on an edge of the table.

Still, the indignant Mrs. Jackson didn't thank him. Nor did she trouble to see him to the door.

Where was he? A neighborhood of dingy wood-frame bungalows, row houses. Northern outskirts of Easton, Pennsylvania. Mid-afternoon: too early to begin drinking. Kyle was driving along potholed streets uncertain where he was headed. He'd have to cross the river again to pick up the big interstate south . . . At a 7-Eleven he bought a six-pack of strong dark ale and parked in a weedy cul-de-sac between a cemetery and a ramp of the highway, drinking. The ale was icy cold and made his forehead ache, not disagreeably. It was a bright blustery October day, a sky of high scudding clouds against a glassy blue. At the city's skyline, haze the hue of chewing-tobacco spittle. Certainly Kyle knew where he was, but where he was mattered less than something else, something crucial that had been decided, but he couldn't recall what it was that had been decided just yet. Except he knew it was crucial. Except so much that seemed crucial in his younger years had turned out to be not so, or not much so. A girl of about fourteen pedaled by on a bicycle, ponytail flying behind her head. She wore tight-fitting jeans, a backpack. She'd taken no notice of him, as if he, and the car in which he was sitting, were invisible. With his eyes he followed her. Followed her as swiftly she pedaled out of sight. Such longing, such love, suffused his heart! He watched the girl disappear, stroking a sinewy throbbing artery just below his jawline.

GEORGE P. PELECANOS

The Dead Their Eyes Implore Us

FROM *Measures of Poison*

SOMEDAY I'M GONNA write all this down. But I don't write so good in English yet, see? So I'm just gonna think it out loud.

Last night I had a dream.

In my dream, I was a kid, back in the village. My friends and family from the *chorio*, they were there, all of us standing around the square. My father, he had strung a lamb up on a pole. It was making a noise, like a scream, and its eyes were wild and afraid. My father handed me my Italian switch knife, the one he gave me before I came over. I cut into the lamb's throat and opened it up wide. The lamb's warm blood spilled onto my hands. My mother told me once: Every time you dream something, it's got to be a reason.

I'm not no kid anymore. I'm twenty-eight years old. It's early in June, Nineteen-hundred and thirty-three. The temperature got up to 100 degrees today. I read in the *Tribune*, some old people died from the heat. Let me try to paint a picture, so you can see in your head the way it is for me right now. I got this little one-room place I rent from some old lady. A Murphy bed and a table, an icebox and a stove. I got a radio I bought for a dollar and ninety-nine. I wash my clothes in a tub, and afterwards I hang the *roocha* on a cord I stretched across the room. There's a bunch of clothes, *pantalonia* and one of my work shirts and my *vrakia* and socks, on there now. I'm sitting here at the table in my union suit. I'm smoking a Fatima and drinking a cold bottle of Abner Drury beer. I'm looking at my hands. I got blood underneath my fingernails. I washed real good but it was hard to get it all.

It's five, five-thirty in the morning. Let me go back some, to show how I got to where I am tonight.

What's it been, four years since I came over? The boat ride was a boat ride so I'll skip that part. I'll start in America.

When I got to Ellis Island I came straight down to Washington to stay with my cousin Toula and her husband Aris. Aris had a fruit cart down on Pennsylvania Avenue, around 17th. Toula's father owed my father some *lefta* from back in the village, so it was all set up. She offered me a room until I could get on my feet. Aris wasn't happy about it but I didn't give a good goddamn what he was happy about. Toula's father should have paid his debt.

Toula and Aris had a place in Chinatown. It wasn't just for Chinese. Italians, Irish, Polacks, and Greeks lived there, too. Everyone was poor except the criminals. The Chinamen controlled the gambling, the whores, and the opium. All the business got done in the back of laundries and in the restaurants. The Chinks didn't bother no one if they didn't get bothered themselves.

Toula's apartment was in a house right on H Street. You had to walk up three floors to get to it. I didn't mind it. The milkman did it every day and the old Jew who collected the rent managed to do it, too. I figured, so could I.

My room was small, so small you couldn't shut the door all the way when the bed was down. There was only one toilet in the place, and they had put a curtain by it, the kind you hang on a shower. You had to close it around you when you wanted to shit. Like I say, it wasn't a nice place or nothing like it, but it was okay. It was free.

But nothing's free, my father always said. Toula's husband Aris made me pay from the first day I moved in. Never had a good word to say to me, never mentioned me to no one for a job. He was a son of a bitch, that one. Dark, with a hook in his nose, looked like he had some Turkish blood in him. I wouldn't be surprised if the *gamoto* was a Turk. I didn't like the way he talked to my cousin, either, 'specially when he drank. And this *malaka* drank every night. I'd sit in my room and listen to him raise his voice at her, and then later I could hear him fucking her on their bed. I couldn't stand it, I'm telling you, and me without a woman myself. I didn't have no job then so I couldn't even buy a whore. I thought I was gonna go nuts. Then one day I was talking to this guy, Dimitri Karras, lived in the 606 building on H. He told me about a janitor's job opened up at St. Mary's, the church where his son Panayoti and most of the

neighborhood kids went to Catholic school. I put some Wildroot tonic in my hair, walked over to the church, and talked to the head nun. I don't know, she musta liked me or something, 'cause I got the job. I had to lie a little about being a handyman. I wasn't no engineer, but I figured, what the hell, the furnace goes out you light it again, goddamn.

My deal was simple. I got a room in the basement and a coupla meals a day. Pennies other than that, but I didn't mind, not then. Hell, it was better than living in some Hoover Hotel. And it got me away from that bastard Aris. Toula cried when I left, so I gave her a hug. I didn't say nothing to Aris.

I worked at St. Mary's about two years. The work was never hard. I knew the kids and most of their fathers: Karras, Angelos, Nicodemus, Recevo, Damiano, Carchedi. I watched the boys grow. I didn't look the nuns in the eyes when I talked to them so they wouldn't get the wrong idea. Once or twice I treated myself to one of the whores over at the Eastern House. Mostly, down in the basement, I played with my *pootso*. I put it out of my mind that I was jerking off in church.

Meanwhile, I tried to make myself better. I took English classes at St. Sophia, the Greek Orthodox church on 8th and L. I bought a blue serge suit at Harry Kaufman's on 7th Street, on sale for eleven dollars and seventy-five. The Jew tailor let me pay for it a little bit at a time. Now when I went to St. Sophia for the Sunday service I wouldn't be ashamed. I liked to go to church. Not for religion, nothing like that. Sure, I wear a *stavro*, but everyone wears a cross. That's just superstition. I don't love God, but I'm afraid of him. So I went to church just in case, and also to look at the girls. I liked to see 'em all dressed up.

There was this one *koritsi*, not older than sixteen when I first saw her, who was special. I knew just where she was gonna be, with her mother, on the side of the church where the women sat separate from the men. I made sure I got a good view of her on Sundays. Her name was Irene, I asked around. I could tell she was clean. By that I mean she was a virgin. That's the kind of girl you're gonna marry. My plan was to wait till I got some money in my pocket before I talked to her, but not too long so she got snatched up. A girl like that is not gonna stay single forever.

Work and church was for the daytime. At night I went to the

coffeeshouses down by the Navy Yard in Southeast. One of them was owned by a hardworking guy from the neighborhood, Angelos, lived at the 703 building on 6th. That's the *cafeneion* I went to most. You played cards and dice there if that's what you wanted to do, but mostly you could be yourself. It was all Greeks.

That's where I met Nick Stefanos one night, at the Angelos place. Meeting him is what put another change in my life. Stefanos was a Spartan with an easy way, had a scar on his cheek. You knew he was tough but he didn't have to prove it. I heard he got the scar running protection for a hooch truck in upstate New York. Heard a cheap *pistola* blew up in his face. It was his business, what happened, none of mine.

We got to talking that night. He was the head busman down at some fancy hotel on 15th and Penn, but he was leaving to open his own place. His friend Costa, another *Spartiat*, worked there and he was gonna leave with him. Stefanos asked me if I wanted to take Costa's place. He said he could set it up. The pay was only a little more than what I was making, a dollar-fifty a week with extras, but a little more was a lot. Hell, I wanted to make better like anyone else. I thanked Nick Stefanos and asked him when I could start.

I started the next week, soon as I got my room where I am now. You had to pay management for your bus uniform, black pants and a white shirt and short black vest, so I didn't make nothing for a while. Some of the waiters tipped the busmen heavy, and some tipped nothing at all. For the ones who tipped nothing you cleared their tables slower, and last. I caught on quick.

The hotel was pretty fancy and its dining room, up on the top floor, was fancy, too. The china was real, the crystal sang when you flicked a finger at it, and the silver was heavy. It was hard times, but you'd never know it from the way the tables filled up at night. I figured I'd stay there a coupla years, learn the operation, and go out on my own like Stefanos. That was one smart guy.

The way they had it set up was, Americans had the waiter jobs, and the Greeks and Filipinos bused the tables. The coloreds, they stayed back in the kitchen. Everybody in the restaurant was in the same order that they were out on the street: the whites were up top and the Greeks were in the middle; the *mavri* were at the bottom. Except if someone was your own kind, you didn't make much small talk with the other guys unless it had something to do with work. I

didn't have nothing against anyone, not even the coloreds. You didn't talk to them, that's all. That's just the way it was. The waiters, they thought they were better than the rest of us. But there was this one American, a young guy named John Petersen, who was all right. Petersen had brown eyes and wavy brown hair that he wore kinda long. It was his eyes that you remembered. Smart and serious, but gentle at the same time.

Petersen was different than the other waiters, who wouldn't lift a finger to help you even when they weren't busy. John would pitch in and bus my tables for me when I got in a jam. He'd jump in with the dishes, too, back in the kitchen, when the dining room was running low on silver, and like I say, those were coloreds back there. I even saw him talking with those guys sometimes like they were pals. It was like he came from someplace where that was okay. John was just one of those who made friends easy, I guess. I can't think of no one who didn't like him. Well, there musta been one person, at least. I'm gonna come to that later on.

Me and John went out for a beer one night after work, to a saloon he knew. I wasn't comfortable because it was all Americans and I didn't see no one who looked like me. But John made me feel okay and after two beers I forgot. He talked to me about the job and the pennies me and the colored guys in the kitchen were making, and how it wasn't right. He talked about some changes that were coming to make it better for us, but he didn't say what they were.

"I'm happy," I said, as I drank off the beer in my mug. "I got a job, what the hell."

"You want to make more money, don't you?" he said. "You'd like to have a day off once in a while, wouldn't you?"

"Goddamn right. But I take off a day, I'm not gonna get paid."

"It doesn't have to be like that, friend."

"Yeah, okay."

"Do you know what 'strength in numbers' means?"

I looked around for the bartender 'cause I didn't know what the hell John was talking about and I didn't know what to say.

John put his hand around my arm. "I'm putting together a meeting. I'm hoping some of the busmen and the kitchen guys will make it. Do you think you can come?"

"What we gonna meet for, huh?"

"We're going to talk about those changes I been telling you about. Together, we're going to make a plan."

"I don't want to go to no meeting. I want a day off, I'm just gonna go ask for it, eh?"

"You don't understand." John put his face close to mine. "The workers are being exploited."

"I work and they pay me," I said with a shrug. "That's all I know. Other than that? I don't give a damn nothing." I pulled my arm away but I smiled when I did it. I didn't want to join no group, but I wanted him to know we were still pals. "C'mon, John, let's drink."

I needed that job. But I felt bad, turning him down about that meeting. You could see it meant something to him, whatever the hell he was talking about, and I liked him. He was the only American in the restaurant who treated me like we were both the same. You know, man to man. Well, he wasn't the only American who made me feel like a man. There was this woman, name of Laura, a hostess who also made change from the bills. She bought her dresses too small and had hair bleached white, like Jean Harlow. She was about two years and ten pounds away from the end of her looks. Laura wasn't pretty, but her ass could bring tears to your eyes. Also, she had huge tits.

I caught her giving me the eye the first night I worked there. By the third night she said something to me about my broad chest as I was walking by her. I nodded and smiled, but I kept walking 'cause I was carrying a heavy tray. When I looked back she gave me a wink. She was a real whore, that one. I knew right then I was gonna fuck her. At the end of the night I asked her if she would go to the pictures with me sometime. "I'm free tomorrow," she says. I acted like it was an honor and a big surprise.

I worked every night, so we had to make it a matinee. We took the streetcar down to the Earle, on 13th Street, down below F. I wore my blue serge suit and high-button shoes. I looked like I had a little bit of money, but we still got the fisheye, walking down the street. A blonde and a Greek with dark skin and a heavy black mustache. I couldn't hide that I wasn't too long off the boat.

The Earle had a stage show before the picture. A guy named William Demarest and some dancers who Laura said were like the Rockettes. What the hell did I know, I was just looking at their legs. After the coming attractions and the short subject the picture came

on: Gold Diggers of 1933. The man dancers looked like cocksuckers to me. I liked Westerns better, but it was all right. Fifteen cents for each of us. It was cheaper than taking her to a saloon.

Afterwards, we went to her place, an apartment in a row house off H in Northeast. I used the bathroom and saw a Barnards Shaving Cream and other man things in there, but I didn't ask her nothing about it when I came back out. I found her in the bedroom. She had poured us a couple of rye whiskies and drawn the curtains so it felt like the night. A radio played something she called "jug band"; it sounded like colored music to me. She asked me, did I want to dance. I shrugged and tossed back all the rye in my glass and pulled her to me rough. We moved slow, even though the music was fast.

"Bill?" she said, looking up at me. She had painted her eyes with something and there was a black mark next to one of them where the paint had come off.

"Uh," I said.

"What do they call you where you're from?"

"Vasili." I kissed her warm lips. She bit mine and drew a little blood. I pushed myself against her to let her know what I had.

"Why, Va-silly," she said. "You are like a horse, aren't you?"

I just kinda nodded and smiled. She stepped back and got out of her dress and her slip, and then undid her brassiere. She did it slow.

"Ella," I said.

"What does that mean?"

"Hurry it up," I said, with a little motion of my hand. Laura laughed. She pulled the bra off and her tits bounced. They were everything I thought they would be. She came to me and unbuckled my belt, pulling at it clumsy, and her breath was hot on my face. By then, God, I was ready. I sat her on the edge of the bed, put one of her legs up on my shoulder, and gave it to her. I heard a woman having a baby in the village once, and those were the same kinda sounds that Laura made. There was spit dripping out the side of her mouth as I slammed myself into her over and over again. I'm telling you, her bed took some plaster off the wall that day. After I blew my load into her I climbed off. I didn't say nice things to her or nothing like that. She got what she wanted and so did I. Laura smoked a cigarette and watched me get dressed. The whole room

smelled like pussy. She didn't look so good to me no more. I couldn't wait to get out of there and breathe fresh air.

We didn't see each other again outside of work. She only stayed at the restaurant a coupla more weeks, and then she disappeared. I guess the man who owned the shaving cream told her it was time to quit.

For a while there nothing happened and I just kept working hard. John didn't mention no meetings again though he was just as nice as before. I slept late and bused the tables at night. Life wasn't fun or bad. It was just ordinary. Then that bastard Wesley Schmidt came to work and everything changed.

Schmidt was a tall young guy with a thin mustache, big in the shoulders, big hands. He kept his hair slicked back. His eyes were real blue, like water under ice. He had a row of big straight teeth. He smiled all the time, but the smile, it didn't make you feel good.

Schmidt got hired as a waiter, but he wasn't any good at it. He got tangled up fast when the place got busy. He served food to the wrong tables all the time, and he spilled plenty of drinks. It didn't seem like he'd ever done that kind of work before.

No one liked him, but he was one of those guys, he didn't know it, or maybe he knew and didn't care. He laughed and told jokes and slapped the busmen on the back like we were his friends. He treated the kitchen guys like dogs when he was tangled up, raising his voice at them when the food didn't come up as fast as he liked it. Then he tried to be nice to them later.

One time he really screamed at Raymond, the head cook on the line, called him a "lazy shine" on this night when the place was packed. When the dining room cleared up Schmidt walked back into the kitchen and told Raymond in a soft voice that he didn't mean nothing by it, giving him that smile of his and patting his arm. Raymond just nodded real slow. Schmidt told me later, "That's all you got to do, is scold 'em and then talk real sweet to 'em later. That's how they learn. 'Cause they're like children. Right, Bill?" He meant coloreds, I guess. By the way he talked to me, real slow the way you would to a kid, I could tell he thought I was a colored guy, too. At the end of the night the waiters always sat in the dining room and ate a stew or something that the kitchen had prepared. The busmen, we served it to the waiters. I was running dinner out to one of them and forgot something back in the

kitchen. When I went back to get it, I saw Raymond, spitting into a plate of stew. The other colored guys in the kitchen were standing in a circle around Raymond, watching him do it. They all looked over at me when I walked in. It was real quiet and I guess they were waiting to see what I was gonna do.

"Who's that for?" I said. "Eh?"

"Schmidt," said Raymond. I walked over to where they were. I brought up a bunch of stuff from deep down in my throat and spit real good into that plate. Raymond put a spoon in the stew and stirred it up.

"I better take it out to him," I said, "before it gets cold."

"Don't forget the garnish," said Raymond.

He put a flower of parsley on the plate, turning it a little so it looked nice. I took the stew out and served it to Schmidt. I watched him take the first bite and nod his head like it was good. None of the colored guys said nothing to me about it again.

I got drunk with John Petersen in a saloon a coupla nights after and told him what I'd done. I thought he'd get a good laugh out of it, but instead he got serious. He put his hand on my arm the way he did when he wanted me to listen. "Stay out of Schmidt's way," said John.

"Ah," I said, with a wave of my hand. "He gives me any trouble, I'm gonna punch him in the kisser." The beer was making me brave.

"Just stay out of his way."

"I look afraid to you?"

"I'm telling you, Schmidt is no waiter."

"I know it. He's the worst goddamn waiter I ever seen. Maybe you ought to have one of those meetings of yours and see if you can get him thrown out."

"Don't ever mention those meetings again, to anyone," said John, and he squeezed my arm tight. I tried to pull it away from him but he held his grip. "Bill, do you know what a Pinkerton man is?"

"What the hell?"

"Never mind. You just keep to yourself, and don't talk about those meetings, hear?"

I had to look away from his eyes. "Sure, sure."

"Okay, friend." John let go of my arm. "Let's have another beer."

A week later John Petersen didn't show up for work. And a week after that the cops found him floating downriver in the Potomac. I read about it in the *Tribune*. It was just a short notice, and it didn't say nothing else. A cop in a suit came to the restaurant and asked us some questions. A couple of the waiters said that John probably had some bad hootch and fell into the drink. I didn't know what to think. When it got around to the rest of the crew, everyone kinda got quiet, if you know what I mean. Even that bastard Wesley didn't make no jokes. I guess we were all thinking about John in our own way. Me, I wanted to throw up. I'm telling you, thinking about John in that river, it made me sick.

John didn't ever talk about no family and nobody knew nothing about a funeral. After a few days, it seemed like everybody in the restaurant forgot about him. But me, I couldn't forget.

One night I walked into Chinatown. It wasn't far from my new place. There was this kid from St. Mary's, Billy Nicodemus, whose father worked at the city morgue. Nicodemus wasn't no doctor or nothing, he washed off the slabs and cleaned the place, like that. He was known as a hard drinker, maybe because of what he saw every day, and maybe just because he liked the taste. I knew where he liked to drink.

I found him in a no-name restaurant on the Hip-Sing side of Chinatown. He was in a booth by himself, drinking something from a teacup. I crossed the room, walking through the cigarette smoke, passing the whores and the skinny Chink gangsters in their too-big suits and the cops who were taking money from the Chinks to look the other way. I stood over Nicodemus and told him who I was. I told him I knew his kid, told him his kid was good. Nicodemus motioned for me to have a seat.

A waiter brought me an empty cup. I poured myself some gin from the teapot on the table. We tapped cups and drank. Nicodemus had straight black hair wetted down and a big mole with hair coming out of it on one of his cheeks. He talked better than I did. We said some things that were about nothing and then I asked him some questions about John. The gin had loosened his tongue.

"Yeah, I remember him," said Nicodemus, after thinking about it for a short while. He gave me the once-over and leaned forward.

"This was your friend?"

"Yes."

"They found a bullet in the back of his head. A twenty-two."

I nodded and turned the teacup in small circles on the table. "The *Tribune* didn't say nothing about that."

"The papers don't always say. The police cover it up while they look for who did it. But that boy didn't drown. He was murdered first, then dropped in the drink."

"You saw him?" I said.

Nicodemus shrugged. "Sure."

"What'd he look like?"

"You really wanna know?"

"Yeah."

"He was all gray and blown up, like a balloon. The gas does that to 'em, when they been in the water."

"What about his eyes?"

"They were open. Pleading."

"Huh?"

"His eyes. It was like they were sayin' please."

I needed a drink. I had some gin.

"You ever heard of a Pinkerton man?" I said.

"Sure," said Nicodemus. "A detective."

"Like the police?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"They go to work with other guys and pretend they're one of them. They find out who's stealing. Or they find out who's trying to make trouble for the boss. Like the ones who want to make a strike."

"You mean, like if a guy wants to get the workers together and make things better?"

"Yeah. Have meetings and all that. The guys who want to start a union. Pinkertons look for those guys."

We drank the rest of the gin. We talked about his kid. We talked about Schmeling and Baer, and the wrestling match that was coming up between Londos and George Zaharias at Griffith Stadium. I got up from my seat, shook Nicodemus's hand, and thanked him for the conversation.

"*Efcharisto, patrioti.*"

"*Yasou, Vasili.*"

I walked back to my place and had a beer I didn't need. I was

drunk and more confused than I had been before. I kept hearing John's voice, the way he called me "friend." I saw his eyes saying please. I kept thinking, I should have gone to his goddamn meeting, if that was gonna make him happy. I kept thinking I had let him down. While I was thinking, I sharpened the blade of my Italian switch knife on a stone.

The next night, last night, I was serving Wesley Schmidt his dinner after we closed. He was sitting by himself like he always did. I dropped the plate down in front of him.

"You got a minute to talk?" I said.

"Go ahead and talk," he said, putting the spoon to his stew and stirring it around.

"I wanna be a Pinkerton man," I said. Schmidt stopped stirring his stew and looked up my way. He smiled, showing me his white teeth. Still, his eyes were cold.

"That's nice. But why are you telling me this?"

"I wanna be a Pinkerton, just like you."

Schmidt pushed his stew plate away from him and looked around the dining room to make sure no one could hear us. He studied my face. I guess I was sweating. Hell, I know I was. I could feel it dripping on my back.

"You look upset," said Schmidt, his voice real soft, like music. "You look like you could use a friend."

"I just wanna talk."

"Okay. You feel like having a beer, something like that?"

"Sure, I could use a beer."

"I finish eating, I'll go down and get my car. I'll meet you in the alley out back. Don't tell anyone, hear, because then they might want to come along. And we wouldn't have the chance to talk."

"I'm not gonna tell no one. We just drive around, eh? I'm too dirty to go to a saloon."

"That's swell," said Schmidt. "We'll just drive around."

I went out to the alley where Schmidt was parked. Nobody saw me get into his car. It was a blue, '31 Dodge coupe with wire wheels, a rumble seat, and a trunk rack. A five-hundred-dollar car if it was a dime.

"Pretty," I said, as I got in beside him. There were hand-tailored slipcovers on the seats.

"I like nice things," said Schmidt. He was wearing his suit jacket,

and it had to be 80 degrees. I could see a lump under the jacket. I figured, the bastard is carrying a gun.

We drove up to Colvin's, on 14th Street. Schmidt went in and returned with a bag of loose bottles of beer. There must have been a half-dozen Schlitzes in the bag. Him making waiter's pay, and the fancy car and the high-priced beer.

He opened a coupla beers and handed me one. The bottle was ice cold. Hot as the night was, the beer tasted good.

We drove around for a while. We went down to Hanes Point. Schmidt parked the Dodge facing the Washington Channel. Across the channel, the lights from the fish vendors on Maine Avenue threw color on the water. We drank another beer. He gave me one of his tailor-mades and we had a couple smokes. He talked about the Senators and the Yankees, and how Baer had taken Schmeling out with a right in the tenth. Schmidt didn't want to talk about nothing serious yet. He was waiting for the beer to work on me, I knew.

"Goddamn heat," I said. "Let's drive around some, get some air moving."

Schmidt started the coupe. "Where to?"

"I'm gonna show you a whorehouse. Best secret in town."

Schmidt looked me over and laughed. The way you laugh at a clown. I gave Schmidt some directions. We drove some, away from the park and the monuments to where people lived. We went through a little tunnel and crossed into Southwest. Most of the street lamps were broke here. The row houses were shabby, and you could see shacks in the alleys and clothes hanging on lines outside the shacks. It was late, a long time past midnight. There weren't many people out. The ones that were out were coloreds. We were in a place called Bloodfield.

"Pull over there," I said, pointing to a spot along the curb where there wasn't no light. "I wanna show you the place I'm talking about."

Schmidt did it and cut the engine. Across the street were some houses. All except one of them was dark. From the lighted one came fast music, like the colored music Laura had played in her room.

"There it is right there," I said, meaning the house with the light. I was lying through my teeth. I didn't know who lived there and I

sure didn't know if that house had whores. I had never been down here before. Schmidt turned his head to look at the row house. I slipped my switch knife out of my right pocket and laid it flat against my right leg.

When he turned back to face me he wasn't smiling no more. He had heard about Bloodfield and he knew he was in it. I think he was scared.

"You bring me down to niggertown, for what?" he said. "To show me a whorehouse?"

"I thought you're gonna like it."

"Do I look like a man who'd pay to fuck a nigger? Do I? You don't know anything about me."

He was showing his true self now. He was nervous as a cat. My nerves were bad, too. I was sweating through my shirt. I could smell my own stink in the car.

"I know plenty," I said.

"Yeah? What do you know?"

"Pretty car, pretty suits . . . top-shelf beer. How you get all this, huh?"

"I earned it."

"As a Pinkerton, eh?"

Schmidt blinked real slow and shook his head. He looked out his window, looking at nothing, wasting time while he decided what he was gonna do. I found the raised button on the pearl handle of my knife. I pushed the button. The blade flicked open and barely made a sound. I held the knife against my leg and turned it so the blade was pointing back. Sweat rolled down my neck as I looked around. There wasn't nobody out on the street. Schmidt turned his head. He gripped the steering wheel with his right hand and straightened his arm.

"What do you want?" he said.

"I just wanna know what happened to John."

Schmidt smiled. All those white teeth. I could see him with his mouth open, his lips stretched, those teeth showing. The way an animal looks after you kill it. Him lying on his back on a slab.

"I heard he drowned," said Schmidt.

"You think so, eh?"

"Yeah. I guess he couldn't swim."

"Pretty hard to swim, you got a bullet in your head."

Schmidt's smile turned down. "Can you swim, Bill?"

I brought the knife across real fast and buried it into his armpit. I sunk the blade all the way to the handle. He lost his breath and made a short scream. I twisted the knife. His blood came out like someone was pouring it from a jug. It was warm and it splashed onto my hands. I pulled the knife out and while he was kicking at the floorboards I stabbed him a coupla more times in the chest. I musta hit his heart or something because all the sudden there was plenty of blood all over the car. I'm telling you, the seats were slippery with it. He stopped moving. His eyes were open and they were dead.

I didn't get tangled up about it or nothing like that. I wasn't scared. I opened up his suit jacket and saw a steel revolver with wood grips holstered there. It was small caliber. I didn't touch the gun. I took his wallet out of his trousers, pulled the bills out of it, wiped off the wallet with my shirttail, and threw the empty wallet on the ground. I put the money in my shoe. I fit the blade back into the handle of my switch knife and slipped the knife into my pocket. I put all the empty beer bottles together with the full ones in the paper bag and took the bag with me as I got out of the car. I closed the door soft and wiped off the handle and walked down the street. I didn't see no one for a couple of blocks. I came to a sewer and I put the bag down the hole. The next block I came to another sewer and I took off my bloody shirt and threw it down the hole of that one. I was wearing an undershirt, didn't have no sleeves. My pants were black so you couldn't see the blood. I kept walking toward Northwest.

Someone laughed from deep in an alley and I kept on.

Another block or so I came upon a group of *mavri* standing around the steps of a house. They were smoking cigarettes and drinking from bottles of beer. I wasn't gonna run or nothing. I had to go by them to get home. They stopped talking and gave me hard eyes as I got near them. That's when I saw that one of them was the cook, Raymond, from the kitchen. Our eyes kind of came together but neither one of us said a word or smiled or even made a nod.

One of the coloreds started to come toward me and Raymond stopped him with the flat of his palm. I walked on.

I walked for a couple of hours, I guess. Somewhere in Northwest I dropped my switch knife down another sewer. When I heard it hit

the sewer bottom I started to cry. I wasn't crying 'cause I had killed Schmidt. I didn't give a damn nothing about him. I was crying 'cause my father had given me that knife, and now it was gone. I guess I knew I was gonna be in America forever, and I wasn't never going back to Greece. I'd never see my home or my parents again.

When I got back to my place I washed my hands real good. I opened up a bottle of Abner Drury and put fire to a Fatima and had myself a seat at the table.

This is where I am right now.

Maybe I'm gonna get caught and maybe I'm not. They're gonna find Schmidt in that neighborhood and they're gonna figure a colored guy killed him for his money. The cops, they're gonna turn Bloodfield upside down. If Raymond tells them he saw me I'm gonna get the chair. If he doesn't, I'm gonna be free. Either way, what the hell, I can't do nothing about it now. I'll work at the hotel, get some experience and some money, then open my own place, like Nick Stefanos. Maybe if I can find two nickels to rub together, I'm gonna go to church and talk to that girl, Irene, see if she wants to be my wife. I'm not gonna wait too long. She's clean as a whistle, that one. I've had my eye on her for some time.