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Falconer

JOHN CHEEVER

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FALCONER

JOHN CHEEVER

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To

FEDERICO CHEEVER

The main entrance to Falconer—the only entrance for convicts, their visitors and the state—was crowned by an escutcheon representing Liberty, Justice and, between the two, the sovereign power of government. Liberty wore a mobcap and carried a pike. Government was the federal Eagle holding an olive branch and armed with hunting arrows. Justice was conventional; blinded, vaguely erotic in her clinging robes and armed with a headsman's sword. The bas-relief was bronze, but black these days—as black as unpolished anthracite or onyx. How many hundreds had passed under this, the last emblem most of them would see. A man's endeavor to interpret the mystery of imprisonment in terms of symbols. Hundreds, or guessed, thousands, millions was close. Above the escutcheon was a declension of the place names: Falconer Jail 1871, Falconer Reformatory, Falconer Federal Penitentiary, Falconer State Prison, Falconer Correctional Facility, and the last, which had never caught on, Daybreak House. Now cons were inmates, the assholes were officers and the warden was superintendent. Fame is chancy, God knows, but Falconer—with its limited accommodations for two thousand miscreants—was as famous as Newgate. Gone was the water torture, the striped suits, the lock step, the balls and chains, and there was a softball field where the gallows had stood, but at the time of which I'm writing, leg irons were still used in Auburn. You could tell the men from Auburn by the noise they made.

Farragut (fratricide, zip to ten, #734-508-32) had been brought to this old iron place one late summer's day. He wore no leg irons but was manacled to nine other men, four of them black and all of them younger than he. The windows of the van were so high and unclean that he could not see the color of the sky or any of the lights and shapes of the world he was leaving. He had been given forty milligrams of methadone three hours earlier and, torpid, he wanted to see the light of day. The driver, he noticed, stopped for traffic lights, blew his horn and braked on steep hills, but this was all they seemed to share with the rest of humanity. The inestimable shyness of men seemed to paralyze most of them, but not the man manacled to his right. He was a gaunt man with bright hair and a face hideously disfigured by boils and acne. "I hear they have a ball team and if I can play ball I'll be all right. Just so long as I can pitch a game I'll stay alive," he said. "If I can play ball that'll be enough for me. I never know the score, though. That's the way I pitch. The year before last I pitched a no-hitter for Nor Edmonston and I didn't know about it until I come off the mound and heard everybody yelling. And I never got laid free, never once. I paid anywhere from fifty cents to fifty dollars, but I never once shot a lump for free. I guess that's like not knowing the score. Nobody ever give it to me willingly. I know hundreds of men, not so good-looking as me who get it for nothing all the time, but I never got it once, not once for nothing. I just wish I had it free, once."

The van stopped. The man on Farragut's left was tall, and striding out of the van into the yard, threw Farragut to his knees. Farragut got to his feet. He saw the escutcheon for the first time, and, he thought, the last time. This was where he would die. Then he saw the blue sky and nailed his identity to it and to the phrasing of four letters that he had begun to write to his wife, his lawyer, his governor and his bishop. A handful of people watched them quickste

across the yard. Then he distinctly heard a voice say, "But they look so nice!" That would have been some innocent, some stray, and Farragut heard a man in uniform say, "Turn your backs and any one of them would put a shiv in it." But the stray was right. The blue in the space between the van and the prison was the first spread of blue some of them had seen in months. How extraordinary it was and how truly pure they seemed! They would never again look so well. The light of the sky, shining into their condemned faces, showed a great richness of purpose and innocence. "They murder," said the guard, "they rape, they strangle babies into furnaces, they'd strangle their own mother for a stick of chewing gum." Then he turned from the stray to the convicts and began to call: "You're going to be good boys, you're gonna be good boys, you're gonna be good, good boys...." He spread out his call like a train whistle, a hound's belling, some late-night lonely song or cry.

They pulled one another up some stairs into a shabby room. Falconer was very shabby and the shabbiness of the place—everything one saw and touched and smelled had the dimension of neglect—gave the impression, briefly, that this must surely be the twilight and the dying of enforced penance, although there was a tenanted death house in the north of the place. The bars had been enameled white many years ago, but the enamel had been worn back to iron at the chest level, where men instinctively held them. In a farther room the guard who called them good boys unlocked their irons and the deep pleasure of being able to move his arms and his shoulders freely was something Farragut shared with the others. They all rubbed their wrists with their hands. "What time you got?" asked the man with boiled shoes. "Ten-fifteen," said Farragut. "I mean what time of year," said the man. "You got one of the calendar watches. I wanna know the time of year. Here, let me see it, let me see it." Farragut unstrapped his expensive watch and passed it to the stranger and the stranger put it in his pocket. "He stole my watch," Farragut said to the guard. "He just stole my watch." "Oh, did he rahhly," said the guard, "did he rahhly steal your watch?" Then he turned to the thief and asked, "How long was your vacation?" "Ninety-three days," said the thief. "Is that the longest you been out?" "The time before last I was out for a year and a half," said the thief. "Wonder wonders never cease?" asked the guard. But all of this, all that there was to be seen and heard, was wasted on Farragut, who perceived nothing but paralysis and terror.

They were marshaled into a broken-down truck with wooden benches and driven down the road within the walls. At a turn in the road Farragut saw a man in prison grays feeding bread crusts to a dozen pigeons. This image had for him an extraordinary reality, a promise of sanity. The man was a convict and he and the bread and the pigeons were all unwanted by the prison for reasons unknown to Farragut the image of a man sharing his crusts with birds had the resonance of great antiquity. He stood in the truck to watch for as long as he could. He was similarly moved when, in the building they entered, he saw, high on a water pipe at the ceiling, a tarnished silver Christmas garland. The irony was banal but it seemed, like the man feeding birds, to represent a grain of reason. Under the Christmas garland they went into a room furnished with writing chairs whose legs were broken, whose varnish was gone, whose writing surfaces were scarred with initials and obscenities and which seemed, like everything else in Falconer, to have been salvaged from some municipal dump. The first of the screenings was a psychological test that Farragut had already taken in the three drug addiction clinics that he had been confined to. "Are you afraid of germs on doorknobs?" he read; "Would you like to hunt tigers in the jungle?" The irony of this was immeasurably less

penetrating and moving than the man feeding birds and the silver link to Christmas, hung on a pipe. It took them half that day to answer the five hundred questions and then they were marshaled into the mess hall for a meal.

This was much older and larger than what he had seen in the house of detention. I-beams crossed the ceiling. In a tin pitcher on a window sill were some wax flowers whose colors, in that somber place, seemed fiery. He ate sour food with a tin spoon and dropped his spoon and plate into dirty water. Silence was enforced by the administration, but they had themselves enforced a segregation that put the blacks in the north, the whites in the south, with a middle ground for the men who spoke Spanish. After chow his physical, religious and professional characteristics were examined and then, after a long delay, he was led alone into a room where three men in cheap business suits were sitting at a wrecked desk. At either end of the desk were sheathed flags. On the left was a window in which he could see the blue sky beneath whose light he guessed a man might still be feeding pigeons. His head, neck and shoulders had begun to ache and he was very stooped by the time he reached this tribunal and felt himself to be a very small man, a runt, someone who had never experienced or tasted or imagined the greatness of immodesty.

“You are a professor,” said the man on the left, who seemed to speak for the three. Farragut did not raise his head to see his face. “You are a professor and the education of the young—of all those who seek learning—is your vocation. We learn by experience, do we not, and as a professor, distinguished by the responsibilities of intellectual and moral leadership, you have chosen to commit the heinous crime of fratricide while under the influence of dangerous drugs. Aren’t you ashamed?” “I want to be sure that I get my methadone,” Farragut said. “Oh, is there no shame in you!” the man exclaimed. “We are here to help. We are here to help. Until you confess to shame you will have no place in the civilian world,” Farragut made no reply. “Next,” the man said, and Farragut was shown out a door at the back. “I’m Tiny,” a man there said. “Hurry up. I ain’t got all day.”

Tiny’s size was frightening. He was not tall, but his bulk was so unnatural that his clothes would have had to be sewn for him alone, and in spite of what he said about haste he walked very slowly, impeded by the bulk of his thighs. His gray hair was cut like a brush and you could see his scalp. “You got cellblock F,” he said. “F stands for fucks, freaks, fools, fruit, first-timers, fat-asses like me, phantoms, funnies, fanatics, feebies, fences and farts. There’s more, but I forget it. The guy who made it up is dead.” They went up a sloping tunnel past groups of men who hung around talking like men on the street. “F is temporary for you, I think,” said Tiny. “The funny way you talk, they’ll put you in A, where they have the lieutenant governor and the secretary of commerce and all the millionaires.” Tiny turned right and he followed him through an open door into the cellblock. Like everything else, it was shabby, disorderly and malodorous, but his cell had a window and he went to this and saw some sky, two high water towers, the wall, more cellblocks and a corner of the yard that he had entered on his knees. His arrival in the block was hardly noticed. While he was making his bed, someone asked, “You rich?” “No,” said Farragut. “You clean?” “No,” said Farragut. “You suck?” “No,” said Farragut. “You innocent?” Farragut didn’t reply. Someone at the back of the block struck a guitar and began to sing in a tuneless bluegrass voice: “I got those innocence blues/I’m feeling blue all the time....” This could barely be heard above the noise of radios which—talking, singing, performing music—sounded like any city street.

closing time or later.

No one spoke to Farragut at all until, just before the lights went off, the man by whose voice he recognized the singer came to his door. He was skinny and old and had a light unpleasant voice. "I'm Chicken Number Two," he said. "Don't go looking around for Chicken Number One. He's dead. You've probably read about me in the paper. I'm the famous tattooed man, the light-fingered second-story worker who spent his fortune on body art. I show you my pictures someday when I get to know you better." He leered. "But what I come to tell you is that it's all a mistake, a terrible mistake, I mean you being here. They won't find out until tomorrow, it'll be a week or two before they discover this mistake they made, but when they discover it they'll be so sorry, so ashamed of themselves, they'll feel so guilty that the governor will kiss your ass on Fifth Avenue during the Christmas rush. Oh, they'll feel so sorry. Because you see, every trip we make, even for the boneheads, has something good at the end of it like a pot of gold or a fountain of youth or an ocean or a river nobody ain't never seen before or at least a big porterhouse steak with a baked potato. There has to be something good at the end of every journey and that's why I wanted you to know that it's all a terrible mistake. And during the time you're waiting for them to discover this big mistake you'll have your visitors. Oh, I can tell, just by the way you sit there, that you got thousands of friends and lovers and a wife, of course. Your wife will come to visit you. She'll have to come and visit you. She ain't going to be able to divorce you unless you sign the papers and she'll have to bring them here herself. So all I wanted to tell you is what you already knew—it's all a big mistake, a terrible mistake."

Farragut's first visitor was his wife. He was raking leaves in yard Y when the PA said the 734-508-32 had a visitor. He jogged up the road past the firehouse and into the tunnel. It was four flights up to cellblock F. "Visitor," he said to Walton, who let him into his cell. He kept his white shirt prepared for visits. It was dusty. He washed his face and combed his hair with water. "Don't take nuttin but a handkerchief," said the guard. "I know, I know, I know...." Down he went to the door of the visitors' room, where he was frisked. Through the glass he saw that his visitor was Marcia.

There were no bars in the visitors' room, but the glass windows were chicken-wired and open only at the top. A skinny cat couldn't get in or out, but the sounds of the prison moved in freely on the breeze. She would, he knew, have passed three sets of bars—clang, clang, clang—and waited in an anteroom where there were pews or benches, soft-drink engines and a display of the convicts' art with prices stuck in the frames. None of the cons could paint, but you could always count on some wet-brain to buy a vase of roses or a marine sunset if he had been told that the artist was a lifer. There were no pictures on the walls of the visitors' room but there were four signs that said: NO SMOKING. NO WRITING. NO EXCHANGE OF OBJECTS. VISITORS ALLOWED ONE KISS. These were also in Spanish, no smoking had been scratched out. The visitors' room in Falconer, he had been told, was the most lenient in the East. There were no obstructions—nothing but a three-foot counter between the free and the unfree. While he was being frisked he looked around at the other visitors—not so much out of curiosity as to see if there was anything here that might offend Marcia. A con was holding a baby. A weeping old woman talked to a young man. Nearest to Marcia was a Chicano couple. The woman was beautiful and the man was caressing her bare arms.

Farragut stepped into this no man's land and came on hard, as if he had been catapulted into the visit by mere circumstance "Hello darling," he exclaimed as he had exclaimed "Hello darling" at trains, boats, airports, the foot of the driveway, journey's end; but in the past he would have worked out a timetable, aimed at the soonest possible sexual consummation.

"Hello," she said. "You look well."

"Thank you. You look beautiful."

"I didn't tell you I was coming because it didn't seem necessary. When I called to make an appointment they told me you weren't going anywhere."

"That's true."

"I haven't been here sooner because I've been in Jamaica with Gussie."

"That sounds great. How's Gussie?"

"Fat. She's gotten terribly fat."

"Are you getting a divorce?"

"Not now. I don't feel like talking with any more lawyers at this point."

"Divorce is your prerogative."

"I know." She looked at the Chicano couple. The man had stroked his way up to the hair in the girl's armpits. Both their eyes were shut.

"What," she asked, "do you find to talk about with these people?"

"I don't see much of them," he said, "excepting at chow and we can't talk then. You see I'm in cellblock F. It's sort of a forgotten place. Like Piranesi. Last Tuesday they forgot to spring us for supper."

"What is your cell like?"

"Twelve by seven," he said. "The only thing that belongs to me is the Miró print, the Descartes and a color photograph of you and Peter. It's an old one. I took it when we had a house on the Vineyard. How is Peter?"

"Fine."

"Will he ever come to see me?"

"I don't know, I really don't know. He doesn't ask for you. The social worker thinks that for the general welfare, it's best at the moment that he not see his father in jail for murder."

"Could you bring me a photograph?"

"I could if I had one."

"Couldn't you take one?"

"You know I'm no good with a camera."

"Anyway, thank you for sending me the new watch, dear."

"You're welcome."

Someone on cellblock B struck a five-string banjo and began to sing: "I got those cellblock blues/I'm feeling blue all the time/I got those cellblock blues/Fenced in by walls I can't climb...." He was good. The voice and the banjo were loud, clear and true, and brought into that border country the fact that it was a late summer afternoon all over that part of the world. Out the window he could see some underwear and fatigues hung out to dry. They moved in the breeze as if this movement—like the movements of ants, bees and geese—had some polar ordination. For a moment he felt himself to be a man of the world, a world in which his responsiveness was marvelous and absurd. She opened her bag and looked for something. "The army must have been a good preparation for this experience," she said.

"Sort of," he said.

"I never understood why you so liked the army."

He heard, from the open space in front of the main entrance, a guard shouting: "You're going to be good boys, aren't you? You're going to be good boys. You're going to be good, good, good boys." He heard the dragging ring of metal and guessed they'd come from Auburn.

"Oh, dammit," she said. Peevishness darkened her face. "Oh, Goddammit," she said with pure indignation.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I can't find my Kleenex," she said. She was foraging in the bag.

"I'm sorry," he said.

“Everything seems to fight me today,” she said, “absolutely everything.” She dumped the contents of her bag onto the counter.

“Lady, lady,” said the turnkey, who sat above them on an elevated chair like a lifeguard. “Lady, you ain’t allowed to have nothing on the counter but soft drinks and butt cans.”

“I,” she said, “am a taxpayer. I help to support this place. It costs me more to keep my husband in here than it costs me to send my son to a good school.”

“Lady, lady, please,” he said. “Get that stuff off the counter or I’ll have to kick you out.”

She found the small box of paper and pushed the contents of her handbag back to where they belonged. Then he covered her hand with his, deeply thrilled at this recollection of his past. She pulled her hand away, but why? Had she let him touch her for a minute, the warmth, the respite, would have lasted for weeks. “Well,” she said, regaining her composure, “her beauty, he thought.

The light in the room was unkind, but she was equal to its harshness. She had been an authenticated beauty. Several photographers had asked her to model, although her breasts, marvelous for nursing and love, were a little too big for that line of work. “I’m much too shy, much too lazy,” she had said. She had accepted the compliment; her beauty had been documented. “You know,” his son had said, “I can’t talk to Mummy when there’s a mirror in the room. She’s really balmy about her looks.” Narcissus was a man and he couldn’t make the switch, but she had, maybe twelve or fourteen times, stood in front of the full-length mirror in their bedroom and asked him, “Is there another woman of my age in this county who is as beautiful as I?” She had been naked, overwhelmingly so, and he had thought this an invitation, but when he touched her she said, “Stop fussing with my breasts. I’m beautiful. She was, too. He knew that after she’d left, whoever had seen her—the turnkey, for instance—would say, “If that was your wife you’re lucky. Outside the movies I never seen anyone so beautiful.”

If she was Narcissa did the rest of the Freudian doctrine follow? He had never, within his limited judgment, taken this very seriously. She had spent three weeks in Rome with her roommate Maria Lippincott Hastings Guglielmi. Three marriages, a fat settlement for each, and a very unsavory sexual reputation. They then had no maid and he and Peter had cleaned the house, laid and lighted fires, and bought flowers to celebrate her return from Italy. He met her at Kennedy. The plane was late. It was after midnight. When he bent to kiss her she averted her face and pulled down the floppy brim of her new Roman hat. He got her bag, got the car and they started home. “You seem to have had a marvelous time,” he said. “I have never,” she said, “been so happy in my life.” He jumped to no conclusions. The fires would be burning, the flowers gleaming. In that part of the world the ground was covered with dirt and snow. “Was there any snow in Rome?” he asked. “Not in the city,” she said. “There was a little snow on the Via Cassia. I didn’t see it. I read about it in the paper. Nothing so revolting as this.”

He carried the bags into the living room. Peter was there in his pajamas. She embraced him and cried a little. The fires and the flowers missed her by a mile. He could try to kiss her again, but he knew that he might get a right to the jaw. “Can I get you a drink?” he asked, making the offer in a voice that rose. “I guess so,” she said, dropping an octave. “Campari,” she said. “*Limone?*” he asked. “Sì, sì,” she said, “un spritz.” He got the ice, the lemon peel

and handed her the drink. "Put it on the table," she said. "Campari will remind me of my happiness." She went into the kitchen, wet a sponge and began to wash the door of the refrigerator. "We cleaned the place," he said with genuine sadness. "Peter and I cleaned the place. Peter mopped the kitchen floor." "Well, you seem to have forgotten the refrigerator door," she said. "If there are angels in heaven," he said, "and if they are women, I expect they must put down their harps quite frequently to mop drainboards, refrigerator doors, and enameled surface. It seems to be a secondary female characteristic." "Are you crazy?" she asked. "I don't know what you're talking about." His cock, so recently ready for fun, retreated from Waterloo to Paris and from Paris to Elba. "Almost everyone I love has called me crazy," he said. "What I'd like to talk about is love." "Oh, is that it," she said. "Well, here you go." She put her thumbs into her ears, wagged her fingers, crossed her eyes and made a loud farting sound with her tongue. "I wish you wouldn't make faces," he said. "I wish you wouldn't look like that," she said. "Thank God you can't see the way you look." He said nothing more since he knew that Peter was listening.

It took her that time about ten days to come around. It was after a cocktail party and before a dinner. They took a nap, she in his arms. They were one, he thought. The fragrance of her hair lay across his face. Her breathing was heavy. When she woke she touched his face and asked: "Did I snore?" "Terribly," he said, "you sounded like a chain saw." "It was a lovely sleep," she said, "I love to sleep in your arms." Then they made love. His images for a big orgasm was winning the sailboat race, the Renaissance, high mountains. "Christ, that felt good," she said. "What time is it?" "Seven," he said. "When are we due?" "Eight." "You've had your bath, I'll take mine." He dried her with a Kleenex and passed her a lighted cigarette. He followed her into the bathroom and sat on the shut toilet seat while she washed her back with a brush. "I forgot to tell you," he said. "Liza sent us a wheel of Brie." "That's nice," she said, "but you know what? Brie gives me terribly loose bowels." He hitched up his genitals and crossed his legs. "That's funny," he said. "It constipates me." That was the marriage then—not the highest paving of the stair, the clatter of Italian fountains, the wind in the alien olive trees, but this: a jay-naked male and female discussing their bowels.

One more time. It was when they still bred dogs. Hannah, the bitch, had whelped a litter of eight. Seven were in the kennel behind the house. One, a sickly runt who would die, had been let in. Farragut was waked from a light sleep at around three, by the noise of the puppy vomiting or defecating. He slept naked and naked he left the bed, trying not to disturb Marcia, and went down to the living room. There was a mess under the piano. The puppy was trembling. "That's all right, Gordo," he said. Peter had named the puppy Gordon Cooper. It was that long ago. He got a mop, a bucket and some paper towels and crawled bare-assed under the piano to clean up the shit. He had disturbed her and he heard her come down the stairs. She wore a transparent nightgown and everything was to be seen. "I'm sorry I disturbed you," he said. "Gordo had an accident." "I'll help," she said. "You needn't," he said. "It's almost done." "But I want to," she said. On her hands and knees, she joined him under the piano. When it was done she stood and struck her head on that part of the piano that overlaps the bulk of the instrument. "Oh," she said. "Did you hurt yourself?" he asked. "Not terribly," she said. "I hope I won't have a bump or a shiner." "I'm sorry, my darling," he said. He stood, embraced her, kissed her and they made love on the sofa. He lighted a cigarette for her and they returned to bed. But it wasn't much after this that he stepped into the kitchen

get some ice and found her embracing and kissing Sally Midland, with whom she d crewelwork twice a week. He thought the embrace was not platonic and he detested Sally. “Excuse me,” he said. “What for?” she asked. “I broke wind,” he said. That was nasty and he knew it. He carried the ice tray into the pantry. She was silent during dinner and for the rest of the evening. When they woke the next day—Saturday—he asked: “Good morning, darling?” “Shit,” she said. She put on her wrapper and went to the kitchen, where he heard her kick the refrigerator and then the dishwasher. “I hate you broken-down fucking second-rate appliances,” she shouted. “I hate, hate, hate this fucking dirty old-fashioned kitchen. I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls.” This was ominous, he knew, and the omens meant that he would get no breakfast. When she was distempered she regarded the breakfast eggs as if she had laid and hatched them. The egg, the egg for breakfast! The egg was like some sibyl in an Attic drama. “May I have eggs for breakfast?” he had once asked, years and years ago. “Do you expect me to prepare breakfast in this House of Usher?” she had asked. “Could I cook myself some eggs?” he asked. “You may not,” she said. “You will make such a mess in the kitchen that it will take hours for me to clean it up.” On such a morning, he knew, he would be lucky to get a cup of coffee. When he dressed and went down, her face was still very dark and this made him feel much more grievous than hungry. How could he repair this? He saw out the window that there had been a frost, the first. The sun had risen, but the white hoarfrost stood in the shadow of the house and the trees with a Euclidian preciseness. It was after the first frost that you cut the fox grapes she liked for jelly, not much bigger than raisins, black, gamy; he thought that perhaps a bag of fox grapes would do the trick. He was scrupulous about the sexual magic of tools. This could be anxiety or the fact that they had once summered in southwestern Ireland, where tools had been male and female. He would, carrying a basket and shears, have felt like a transvestite. He chose a burlap sack and a hunting knife. He went into the woods—half or three-quarters of a mile from the house—where there was a stand of fox grapes against a stand of pines. The exposure was due east and they were ripe, blackish-purple and rimmed with frost in the shade. He cut them with his manly knife and slapped them into the crude sack. He cut them for her, but who was she? Sally Midland’s lover? Yes, yes, yes! Face the facts. What he faced was either the biggest of falsehoods or the biggest of truths, but in any case a sense of reasonableness enveloped and supported him. But if she loved Sally Midland, didn’t he love Chucky Drew? He liked to be with Chucky Drew, but when they stood side by side in the shower he thought that Chucky looked like a diseased chicken, with flabby arms like the arms of those women who used to play bridge with his mother. He had not loved a man, he thought, since he had left the Boy Scouts. So, with his bag of wild grapes, he returned to the house, burs on his trousers, his brow bitten by the last flies of that year. She had gone back to bed. She lay there with her face in the pillow. “I picked some grapes,” he said. “We had the first frost last night. I picked some fox grapes for jelly.” “Thank you,” she said, into the pillow. “I’ll leave them in the kitchen,” he said. He spent the rest of the day preparing the house for winter. He took down the screens and put up the storm windows, banked the rhododendrons with raked and acorn oak leaves, checked the oil level in the fuel tank and sharpened his skates. He worked alone with numerous hornets who bumped against the eaves, looking, even as he, for some sanctuary for the coming ice age....

“It was partly because we stopped doing things together,” he said. “We used to do s

much together. We used to sleep together, travel together, ski, skate, sail, go to concerts, we did everything together, we watched the World Series and drank beer together although neither of us likes beer, not in this country. That was the year Lomberg, whatever his name was, missed a no-hitter by half an inning. You cried. I did too. We cried together.”

“You had your fix,” she said. “We couldn’t do that together.”

“But I was clean for six months,” he said. “It didn’t make any difference. Cold turkey. nearly killed me.”

“Six months is not a lifetime,” she said, “and anyhow, how long ago was that?”

“Your point,” he said.

“How are you now?”

“I’m down from forty milligrams to ten. I get methadone at nine every morning. A pansy deals it out. He wears a hairpiece.”

“Is he on the make?”

“I don’t know. He asked me if I liked opera.”

“You don’t, of course.”

“That’s what I told him.”

“That’s good. I wouldn’t want to be married to a homosexual, having already married a homicidal drug addict.”

“I did not kill my brother.”

“You struck him with a fire iron. He died.”

“I struck him with a fire iron. He was drunk. He hit his head on the hearth.”

“All penologists say that all convicts claim innocence.”

“Confucius say ...”

“You’re so superficial, Farragut. You’ve always been a lightweight.”

“I did not kill my brother.”

“Shall we change the subject?”

“Please.”

“When do you think you’ll be clean?”

“I don’t know. I find it difficult to imagine cleanliness. I can claim to imagine this, but it would be false. It would be as though I had claimed to reinstall myself in some afternoon of my youth.”

“That’s why you’re a lightweight.”

“Yes.”

He did not want a quarrel, not there, not ever again with her. He had observed, in the last year of their marriage, that the lines of a quarrel were as ritualistic as the words and the sacrament of holy matrimony. “I don’t have to listen to your shit anymore,” she had screamed. He was astonished, not at her hysteria, but at the fact that she had taken the words out of his mouth. “You’ve ruined my life, you’ve ruined my life,” she screamed. “There

nothing on earth as cruel as a rotten marriage.” This was all on the tip of his tongue. But then, listening for her to continue to anticipate his thinking, he heard her voice, deepened and softened with true grief, begin a variation that was not in his power. “You are the biggest mistake I ever made,” she said softly. “I thought that my life was one hundred percent frustration, but when you killed your brother I saw that I had underestimated my problems.

When she spoke of frustration she sometimes meant the frustration of her career as a painter, which had begun and ended by her winning second prize at an art show in college twenty-five years ago. He had been called a bitch by a woman he deeply loved and he had always kept this possibility in mind. The woman had called him a bitch when they were both jay-naked on the upper floor of a good hotel. She then kissed him and said: “Let’s pour whiskey all over one another and drink it.” They had, and he could not doubt the judgment of such a woman. So bitchily, perhaps, he went over her career as a painter. When they first met she had lived in a studio and occupied herself mostly with painting. When they married the *Times* had described her as a painter and every apartment and house they lived in had a studio. She painted and painted and painted. When guests came for dinner they were shown her paintings. She had her paintings photographed and sent to galleries. She had exhibited in public parks, streets and flea markets. She had carried her paintings up Fifty-seventh Street, Sixty-third Street, Seventy-second Street, she had applied for grants, awards, admission to subsidized painting colonies, she had painted and painted and painted, but her work had never been received with any enthusiasm at all. He understood, he tried to understand, but that he was. This was her vocation, as powerful, he guessed, as the love of God, and as with some star-crossed priest, her prayers misfired. This had its rueful charms.

Her passion for independence had reached into her manipulation of their joint checking account. The independence of women was nothing at all new to him. His experience was broad, if not exceptional. His great-grandmother had been twice around the Horn, under sail. She was supercargo, of course, the captain’s wife, but this had not protected her from great storms at sea, loneliness, the chance of mutiny and death or worse. His grandmother had wanted to be a fireman. She was pre-Freudian, but not humorless about this. “I love bells,” she said, “ladders, hoses, the thunder and crash of water. Why can’t I volunteer for the fire department?” His mother had been an unsuccessful businesswoman, the manager of tearooms, restaurants, dress shops and at one time the owner of a factory that turned out handbags, painted cigarette boxes and doorstops. Marcia’s thrust for independence was not what he knew, the burden of his company but the burden of history.

He had caught on to the checkbook manipulation almost as soon as it began. She had a little money of her own, but scarcely enough to pay for her clothes. She was dependent upon him and was determined, since she couldn’t correct this situation, to conceal it. She had begun to have tradesmen cash checks and then claim that the money had been spent for the maintenance of the house. Plumbers, electricians, carpenters and painters didn’t quite understand what she was doing, but she was solvent and they didn’t mind cashing her checks. When Farragut discovered this he knew that her motive was independence. She must have known that he knew. Since they were both knowledgeable, what was the point of bringing it up unless he wanted a shower of tears—which was the last thing he wanted.

“And how,” he asked, “is the house? How is Indian Hill?” He did not use the possessive

pronoun—My house, Your house, Our house. It was still his house and would be until she got a divorce. She didn't reply. She did not draw on her gloves finger by finger, or touch her hair or resort to any of the soap opera chestnuts used to express contempt. She was sharper than that. "Well," she said, "it's nice to have a dry toilet seat."

He jogged out of the visitors' room and up the stairs to cellblock F. He hung his white shirt on a hanger and went to the window, where, for the space of about a foot, he could focus on two steps of the entrance and the sidewalk the visitors would take on their way to cars, taxis or the train. He waited for them to emerge like a waiter in an American-plan hotel waiting for the dining room doors to open, like a lover, like a drought-ruined farmer waiting for rain, but without the sense of the universality of waiting.

They appeared—one, three, four, two—twenty-seven in all. It was a weekday. Chicano blacks, whites, his upper-class wife with her bell-shaped coif—whatever was fashionable that year. She had been to the hairdresser before she came to prison. Had she said as much? "I'm not going to a party, I'm going to jail to see my husband." He remembered the women in the sea before Ann Ecbatan's coming out. They all swam a breast stroke to keep their hair dry. Now some of the visitors carried paper bags in which they brought home the contraband they had tried to pass on to their loved ones. They were free, free to run, jump, fuck, drink, book a seat on the Tokyo plane. They were free and yet they moved so casually through the precious element that it seemed wasted on them. There was no appreciation of freedom in the way they moved. A man stooped to pull up his socks. A woman rooted through her handbag to make sure she had the keys. A younger woman, glancing at the overcast sky, put up a green umbrella. An old and very ugly woman dried her tears with a scrap of paper. These were their constraints, the signs of their confinement, but there was some naturalness, some unself-consciousness about their imprisonment that he, watching them between bars, cruelly lacked.

This was not pain, nothing so simple and clear as that. All he could identify was some disturbance in his tear ducts, a blind, unthinking wish to cry. Tears were easy; a good ten-minute hand job. He wanted to cry and howl. He was among the living dead. There were no words, no living words, to suit this grief, this cleavage. He was primordial man confronted with romantic love. His eyes began to water as the last of the visitors, the last show, disappeared. He sat on his bunk and took in his right hand the most interesting, worldly, responsive and nostalgic object in the cell. "Speed it up," said Chicken Number Two. "You only got eight minutes to chow."

Cellblock F was only half tenanted. Most of the toilets and locks on the upper tier were broken and these were empty. Nothing but the cell locks really worked and the toilet in Farragut's cell flushed itself noisily and independently. The air of obsolescence—the feeling that these must surely be the last days of incarceration—was strong. Of the twenty men in Farragut, at the end of two weeks, fell into a family group that consisted of Chicken Number Two, Bumpo, the Stone, the Cuckold, Ransome and Tennis. This organization was deep and mysterious. Ransome was a very tall and a handsome man who was supposed to have murdered his father. Farragut had quickly learned never to ask a comrade what he was doing in Falconer. It would be a stupid violation of the terms on which they lived with one another and in any case the truth was not in them. Ransome was laconic. He spoke to almost no one

but the Stone, who was helpless. Everyone talked about the Stone. Some criminal organization had pierced his eardrums with an ice pick. They had then framed him, bought him a long sentence and given him a two-hundred-dollar hearing machine. This was a canvas carrier that hung from his shoulders by straps. It contained a plastic flesh-colored receiver, a pipe to his right ear and four batteries. Ransome guided the Stone to and from mess, urged him to wear his hearing appliance and changed his batteries when they faded. He almost never spoke to anyone else.

Tennis had come on hard on Farragut's second day, early in the morning when they had swept their cells and were waiting for chow. "I'm Lloyd Haversham, Jr.," he said. "Does the name ring a bell? No? They call me Tennis. I thought you might know because you look like the sort of man who might play tennis. I won the Spartanburg doubles, twice in a row. I'm the second man in the history of tennis to have done this. I learned on private courts, of course, I've never played on a public court. I'm listed in the sports encyclopedia, the dictionary of sports greats, I'm a member of the tennis academy and I was cover story in the March issue of *Racquets*. *Racquets* is the leading publication of the tennis equipment industry." While he talked, Tennis displayed all the physical business of a hard sell—hands, shoulders, pelvis, everything was in motion. "I'm in here because of a clerical error, an error in banking. I'm a visitor, a transient, I see the parole board in a few days and I'll be out there. I deposited thirteen thousand dollars in the Bank for Mutual Savings on the morning of the ninth and wrote three checks for two hundred dollars before the deposit had cleared. By accident I used my roommate's checkbook—he was runner-up in the Spartanburg doubles and never forgave me for my victory. All a man needs is a little jealousy and a clerical error—bad luck—and they throw him into jail, but I'll leap the net in a week or two. This is more of a goodbye than a hello but hello anyhow!" Tennis, like most of them, talked in his sleep and Farragut had heard him asking: "Have you been taken care of? Have you been taken care of?" Bumpo explained this to Farragut. Tennis's athletic career was thirty years in the past and he had been picked up for check forgery when he was working as a delicatessen clerk. Bumpo had this to say about Tennis, but he said nothing about himself, although he was the cellblock celebrity and was supposed to have been the second man to hijack an airplane. He had forced a pilot to fly from Minneapolis to Cuba and was in on an eighteen-year sentence for kidnapping. Bumpo never mentioned this or anything else about himself excepting a large ring he wore, set with a diamond or a piece of glass. "It's worth twenty thousand," he said. The price varied from day to day. "I'd sell it, I'd sell it tomorrow if somebody'd guarantee me it would save a life. I mean if there was some very old and lonely and hungry person whose life I could save, well, then I'd sell it. Of course, I'd have to see the documents. Or if there was some little girl who was defenseless and all alone and I was sure that nobody or nothing else in the world could save her life, well, then I'd give her my stone. But first I'd want to see the documents. I'd want to have affidavits and photographs and birth certificates, but if it could be proven to me that my rock was the only thing that was between her and the grave, well, then she could have it in ten minutes."

Chicken Number Two talked about his brilliant career as a jewel thief in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, and while he talked in his sleep more than the rest of them, there was in his talk a refrain. "Don't ask her for a lower price," he would shout. His voice was vehement and irritable. "I told you, don't ask her for a lower price. She ain't going to give

to you for a lower price, so don't ask." When he talked about his career he did not detail his successes. He spoke mostly about his charm. "The reason I was so great was my charm. I was very charming. Everybody knew I had class. And willingness, I had willingness. I give the impression of a very willing person. Anybody asks me to get anything, I give them the impression that I'll try. Get me the Niagara Falls, they say. Get me the Empire State Building. Yes sir, I always say, yes sir, I'll try. I got class."

The Cuckold, like Tennis, came on hard. Farragut had not been a member of the family for a week before the Cuckold paid him a call. He was a fat man with a very pink face, thin hair and a galling and exaggerated smile. The most interesting thing about him was that he ran a business. He paid a package of mentholated cigarettes for every two spoons that anyone could lift from the mess hall. In the shop he turned the spoons into bracelets, and Walton, the cell corporal, kited these out in his underwear and fenced them at a gift shop in the nearest city, where they were advertised as having been created by a man who was condemned to death. They sold for twenty-five dollars. With these profits he kept his cell full of canned hams, chickens, sardines, peanut butter, crackers and pasta, which he used as bait to get his comrades to listen to his stories about his wife. "Let me entertain you with a nice slice of ham," he said to Farragut. "Sit down, sit down, and have a nice slice of ham, but first let me tell you what I'm in here for. I iced my wife by mistake. The night I iced her was the night she told me none of the three kids was mine. Also she told me that the two abortions I paid for and the miscarriage wasn't mine either. That's when I iced her. Even when things were going good she couldn't be trusted. Like there was this week or two when we were just fucking all the time. I was in sales but it was an off-season and we just stayed in the house fucking and eating and drinking. So then she said what we needed was a vacation from fucking one another and I could see what she meant. I was really in love. She said wouldn't it be great if we was away for a couple of weeks and how wonderful it would be when we were reunited. Wouldn't it. So I saw what she meant and I went back on the road for a couple of weeks but one night in South Dakota I got drunk and laid a stranger and I felt very guilty so when I come home and took off my pants I felt I had to confess to her that I had been impure and so I did. So then she kissed me and said it didn't matter and she was glad I had confessed because she had a confession to make herself. She said that on the day I left she got a cab to go to the other side of town to see her sister and this cabdriver had such sparkly black eyes that they seemed to stick into her and so she scored with the cabdriver when he got off duty at ten. And the next day she went to Melcher's to buy some cat food and there was a traffic pileup to which she was a witness and when this handsome state trooper was questioning her he asked if he could continue the questioning at home and so she scored with him. So then that night, that very night, an old high school chum showed up and she scored, wet-decked with him. Then the next morning, the very next morning, when she was getting gas at Harry's she got the hots for this new gas pumper and he comes over to the house on his lunch hour. So at about that time I got back into my pants and went out of the house and down to the bar on the corner and stayed there for about two hours but at the end of two hours I was back in bed with her." "You were going to give me a piece of ham," said Farragut. "Oh, yes," said the Cuckold. He was both stingy and greedy, and Farragut got only a thin, small slice of ham. Chicken bargained with the Cuckold and wouldn't go into his cell until he had been promised a set quantity of food.

Farragut queued up for supper between Bumpo and Tennis that night. They had rice, franks, bread, oleomargarine and half a canned peach. He palmed three slices of bread for his cat and jogged up to cellblock F. Jogging gave him the illusion of freedom. Tiny was sitting down to his supper of outside food at his desk at the end of the block. He had on his plate a nice London broil, three baked potatoes, a can of peas and on another plate a whole store-bought cake. Farragut sighed loudly when he smelled the meat. Food was a recently revealed truth in his life. He had reasoned that the Holy Eucharist was nutritious if you got enough of it. In some churches, at some times, they had baked the bread—hot, fragrant and crusty—in the chancel. Eat this in memory of me. Food had something to do with his beginnings as a Christian and a man. To cut short a breast-feeding, he had read somewhere, was traumatizing and from what he remembered of his mother she might have yanked her breast out of his mouth in order not to be late for her bridge game; but this was coming close to self-pity and he had tried to leach self-pity out of his emotional spectrum. Food was food, hunger was hunger and his half-empty belly and the perfume of roast meat established a rapport that would take the devil to cut in two. “Eat good,” he said to Tiny. A telephone was ringing in another room. The TV was on and the majority had picked, through a rigged ballot, some game show. The irony of TV, played out against any form of life or death, was superficial and fortuitous.

So as you lay dying, as you stood at the barred window watching the empty square, you heard the voice of a man, a half-man, the sort of person you wouldn't have spoken to in school or college, the victim of a bad barber, tailor and makeup artist, exclaim: “We present with pleasure to Mrs. Charles Alcorn, of 11,235 275th Boulevard, the four-door cathedral-size refrigerator containing two hundred pounds of prime beef and enough staples to feed a family of six for two months. This includes pet food. Don't you cry, Mrs. Alcorn—oh, darling, don't you cry, don't you cry.... And to the other contestants a complete kit of the sponsor's product.” The time for banal irony, the voice-over, he thought, is long gone. Give me the chords, the deep rivers, the unchanging profundity of nostalgia, love and death. Tiny had begun to roar. He was usually a reasonable man, but now his voice was high, shattering and crazy. “You rat-fucking, cock-sucking, ass-tonguing, sneaky, stinking fleabag.”

Obscenities recalled for Farragut the long-ago war with Germany and Japan. “In a fucking line-rifle company,” he or anyone else might have said, “you get the fucking, malfunctioning M-1's, fucking '03's to simulate fucking carbines, fucking obsolete BAR's and fucking sixty-millimeter mortars where you have to set the fucking sight to bracket the fucking target.” Obscenity worked on their speech like a tonic, giving it force and structure, but the word “fucking,” so much later, had for Farragut the dim force of a recollection. “Fucking” meant M-1's, sixty-pound packs, landing nets, the stinking Pacific islands with Tokyo Rose coming over the radio. Now Tiny's genuine outburst unearthed a past, not very vivid because there was no sweetness in it, but a solid, memorable four years of his life. The Cuckold passed around and Farragut asked, “What's wrong with Tiny?” “Oh, don't you know,” said the Cuckold. “He had just begun his dinner when the deputy called him on the outside phone to check on work sheets. When he got back, a couple of cats, big cats, had finished off his steak and potatoe shit in his plate and were halfway through his cake. He tore the head off one of them. The other got away. When he was tearing off the cat's head he got very badly bitten. He was bleeding and bleeding. I guess he's gone to the infirmary.”

If prisons were constructed to make any living thing happy it might have been cats, although the sententiousness of this observation made Farragut irritable. But the fact was that trained men with drawing boards, hod carriers, mortar and stone had constructed buildings that deny their own kind a fair measure of freedom. The cats profited most. Even the fattest of them, the sixty-pounders, could ease their way between the bars, where there were plenty of rats and mice for the hunters, lovelorn men for the tender and the teases, and frank meatballs, day-old bread and oleomargarine to eat.

Farragut had seen the cats of Luxor, Cairo and Rome, but with everybody going around the world these days and writing cards and sometimes books about it, there wasn't much point in linking the shadowy cats of prison to the shadowy cats of the ancient world. As a dog breeder he had not much liked cats, but he had changed. There were more cats in Falconer than there were convicts, and there were two thousand convicts. Make it four thousand cats. Their smell overwhelmed everything, but they checked the rat and mouse population. Farragut had a favorite. So did everybody else—some had as many as six. Some of the men and wives brought them Kitty Chow—stuff like that. Loneliness taught the intransigent to love their cats as loneliness can change anything on earth. They were warm, they were hairy, they were living, and they gave fleeting glimpses of demonstrativeness, intelligence, uniqueness and sometimes grace and beauty. Farragut called his cat Bandit because—black and white—he had a mask like a stagecoach robber or a raccoon. “Hi, pussy,” he said. He put the three pieces of bread on the floor. Bandit first licked the margarine off the bread and then, with feline niceness, ate the crusts, took a drink of water out of the toilet, finished the soft part and climbed onto Farragut's lap. His claws cut through the fatigues like the thorns of a rose. “Good Bandit, good Bandit. You know what, Bandit? My wife, my only wife, came to see me today and I don't know what in hell to think about the visit. I remember mostly watching her walk away from the place. Shit, Bandit, I love her.” He worked behind the cat's ears with his thumb and third finger. Bandit purred loudly and shut his eyes. He had never figured out the cat's sex. He was reminded of the Chicanos in the visiting room. “It's a good thing you don't turn me on, Bandit. I used to have an awful time with my member. Once I climbed the mountain in the Abruzzi. Six thousand feet. The woods were supposed to be full of bears. That's why I climbed the mountain. To see the bears. There was a refuge on the top of the mountain and I got there just before dark. I went in and built a fire and ate the sandwiches I'd brought and drank some wine and got into my sleeping bag and looked around for sleep but my Goddamned member was not in the mood for sleep at all. It was throbbing and asking where the action was, why we'd climbed this mountain with no rewards, what was my purpose and so forth. Then someone, some animal, started scratching at the door. It must have been a wolf or a bear. Except for me there wasn't anything else on the mountain. So then I said to my member, If that's a female wolf or a female bear, perhaps I can fix you up. This made it thoughtful for once, pensive, and I got to sleep but—”

Then the general alarm rang. Farragut had never heard it before and didn't know what was called, but it was a racket, obviously meant to announce fires, riots, the climax and the end of things. It rang on and on, long after its usefulness as an announcement, a warning, an alert, an alarm, had come to an end. It sounded like some approach to craziness, it was out of control, it was in control, in possession, and then someone pulled a switch and there was the brief, brief sweetness that comes with the cessation of pain. Most of the cats had hidden and

the wiser ones had taken off. Bandit was behind the toilet. Then the metal door rolled open and a bunch of guards came in, led by Tiny. They wore the yellow waterproofs they wore for fire drill and they all carried clubs.

“Any of you got cats in your cells throw them out,” said Tiny. Two cats at the end of the block, thinking perhaps that Tiny had food, came toward him. One was big, one was little. Tiny raised his club, way in the air, and caught a cat on the completion of the falling arc, tearing it in two. At the same time another guard bashed in the head of the big cat. Blood, brains and offal splattered their yellow waterproofs and the sight of carnage reverberated through Farragut’s dental work; caps, inlays, restorations, they all began to ache. He snapped his head around to see that Bandit had started for the closed door. He was pleased at the show of intelligence and by the fact that Bandit had spared him the confrontation that was going on between Tiny and Chicken Number Two: “Throw that cat out,” said Tiny to Chicken. “You ain’t going to kill my pussy,” said Chicken. “You want six days cell lock,” said Tiny. “You ain’t going to kill my pussy,” said Chicken. “Eight days cell lock,” said Tiny. Chicken said nothing. He was hanging on to the cat. “You want the hole,” said Tiny. “You want a month in the hole.” “Ill come back and get it later,” said one of the other men.

It was half and half. Half the cats cased the slaughter and made for the closed door, half of them wandered around at a loss, sniffing the blood of their kind and sometimes drinking it. Two of the guards vomited and half a dozen cats got killed eating the vomit. The cats that hung around the door, waiting to be let out, were an easy target. When a third guard got sick, Tiny said, “O.K., O.K., that’s enough for tonight, but it don’t give me back my London brood. Get the fire detail to clean this up.” He signaled for the door to open and when it rolled back, six or maybe ten cats escaped, giving to Farragut some reminder of the invincible.

The fire detail came in with waste cans, shovels and two lengths of hose. They sluiced down the block and shoveled up the dead cats. They sluiced down the cells as well and Farragut climbed onto his bunk, knelt there and said: “Blessed are the meek,” but he couldn’t remember what came next.

Farragut was a drug addict and felt that the consciousness of the opium eater was much broader, more vast and representative of the human condition than the consciousness of someone who had never experienced addiction. The drug he needed was a distillate of earth, air, water and fire. He was mortal and his addiction was a beautiful illustration of the bounds of his mortality. He had been introduced to drugs during a war on some island where the weather was suffocating, the jungle rot of his hairy parts was suppurating and the enemies were murderers. The company medic had ordered gallons of a sticky yellow cough syrup and every morning the "in" group drank a glass of this and went into combat, drugged and at peace with suffocation, suppuration and murder. This was followed by Benzedrine, and Benzedrine and his beer ration got him through the war and back to his own shores, his own home and his wife. He went guiltlessly from Benzedrine to heroin, encouraged in his addiction by almost every voice he heard. Yesterday was the age of anxiety, the age of the fish, and today, his day, his morning, was the mysterious and adventurous age of the needle. His generation was the generation of addiction. It was his school, his college, the flag under which he marched into battle. The declaration of addiction was in every paper, magazine and airborne voice. Addiction was the law of the prophets. When he began to teach, he and his department head would shoot up before the big lecture, admitting that what was expected of them from the world could be produced only by the essence of a flower. It was challenge and response. The new buildings of the university outstripped the human scale, the human imagination, the wildest human dreams. The bridges that he drove across to get to the university were the distillate of engineering computers, a sort of mechanical Holy Ghost. The planes that took him from his university to some other university arced luxuriously into an altitude where men would perish. There was no philosophical suture that could make anything but destructiveness of the sciences that were taught in the high buildings he could see from the windows of English and Philosophy. There were some men of such stupidity that they did not respond to these murderous contradictions and led lives that were without awareness and distinction. His memory of a life without drugs was like a memory of himself as a blond, half-naked youth in good flannels, walking on a white beach between the dark sea and a rank of leonine granite, and to seek out such a memory was contemptible. A life without drugs seemed in fact and in spirit a remote and despicable point in his past. Binoculars upon telescopes, lens grating lens, employed to pick out a figure of no consequence on a long gone summer's day.

But in the vastness of his opium eater's consciousness was—no more than a grain of sand—the knowledge that if his inspired knowledge of the earth's drugs was severed, he would face a cruel and unnatural death. Congressmen and senators sometimes visited prison. They were seldom shown the methadone line, but twice when they had stumbled on this formation they had objected to the sweat of the taxpayers' brow being wasted to sustain convicted felons in their diseased addiction. Their protests had not been effective, but Farragut's feelings about visiting senators in prison had turned into a murderous hatred since these men might kill him. The fear of death is for all of us everywhere, but for the great intelligence of the

opium eater it is beautifully narrowed into the crux of drugs. To starve to death, to burn or drown in the bliss of a great high, would be nothing at all. Drugs belonged to all exalted experience, thought Farragut. Drugs belonged in church. Take this in memory of me and be grateful, said the priest, laying an amphetamine on the kneeling man's tongue. Only the opium eater truly understands the pain of death. When one morning the orderly who gave Farragut his methadone sneezed, this was for Farragut an ominous and a dreadful sound. The orderly might come down with a cold, and considering the nature of the prison bureaucracy there might not be anyone else who had permission to issue the drug. The sound of a sneeze meant death.

A search for contraband was called on Thursday and the cellblocks were off limits until after night chow. At around eight the names of the malefactors were announced. The Cuckoo and Farragut were called and they went down to the deputy warden's office. Two spoons had been found, hidden in Farragut's toilet bowl. He was given six days cell lock. Farragut faced the sentence calmly by first considering the pain of confinement. He assured himself that he could stand confinement with composure. He was at that time the prison's chief typist, respected for his intelligence, efficiency and speed, and he had to face the possibility that in his absence some new typist might be put in his place in the shop and his slot, his job, his self-importance, would be eclipsed. Someone might have come in that afternoon on the bus who could fire off dittos at twice his speed and usurp his office, his chair, his desk and his lamp. Worried about the thrall of confinement and the threat of his self-esteem, Farragut went back to Tiny, gave him his penance slip and asked: "How will I get my fix?"

"I'll check," said Tiny. "They'll bring it up from the infirmary, I guess. You don't get nothing until tomorrow morning." Farragut didn't need methadone then, but the morning threatened to usurp the facts of the night. He undressed, got into bed and watched the news on TV. The news for the last two weeks had been dominated by a murderess. She had been given the usual characteristics. She and her husband lived in an expensive house in an exclusive community. The house was painted white, the grounds were planted with costly flowers and the lawn and the hedges were beautifully maintained. Her character had been admired. She taught Sunday school and had been a den mother for the Girl Scouts. Her coffeecakes for the Trinity Church bake sale were famous and at PTA meetings she expressed herself with intelligence, character and charm. "Oh, she was so kind," her neighbors said, "so clean, so friendly, she loved him so that I can't imagine ..." What they couldn't imagine was that she had murdered her husband, carefully drained his blood and flushed it down the toilet, washed him clean and begun to rectify and improve his physique. First she decapitated the corpse and replaced his head with the drained head of a second victim. She then replaced his genitalia with the genitals of her third victim and his feet with the feet of her fourth. It was when she invited a neighbor in to see this perfect man that suspicions had been aroused. She then vanished. Offers to exploit the remains for commercial purposes were being considered, but nothing had been agreed upon. Night after night the fragments of the tale ended with a drawn away shot of the serene white house, the specimen planting and the velvet lawn.

Lying in bed, Farragut felt his anxiety beginning to mount. He would be denied his fix in the morning. He would die. He would be murdered. He then remembered the times when his life had been threatened. Firstly his father, having written Farragut's name with his cock, had tried to erase the writing. One of his mother's favorite stories was of the night that Farragut

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