Master Prim

James Whitfield Ellison

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a novel by

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When I was young and not yet aware of my limitations, my ambition was to become a chess master. Professionals, ordinarily slow to praise, made much of me, and before my tenth birthday one of my better (but not best) games was awarded a brilliancy prize and printed along with a profile of me in a national magazine. At thirteen my chess began to level off, although four difficult years would pass before I grasped the futility of my dream and dared admit defeat.

Memory, concentration, imagination and willpower deserted me; each game raged as a battle with myself, every defeat chipped away at my self-esteem. I was never especially communicative, even with my mother whom I adored, and when at last I saw stretched out along the years a desert of mediocrity there was no one to turn to; nothing mattered any

more. I quit school and ran away to California and tried to lock myself out of life. For nearly two years there were dark hours when I entertained the possibility of suicide. Then something happened.

One definition of maturity (my own) has always made enormous sense to me: the decision to be good to yourself. Jane — my wife of the last twenty-two years, the lucky stroke of a lifetime — became my first crucial act of self-generosity. I met her by pure chance. Rain inundated Hollywood the night I saw her sprinting along the slick streets with no raincoat or umbrella to protect her and her hands arched over her head. Not knowing why, I ran after her, past lighted shop windows with neon lettering all raveled by rain — I remember that — and when I came abreast of her I ripped off my coat and wrapped it around her shoulders.

If I said that at that instant chess dropped out of my life as a serious concern I would be overdramatizing — but not by so very much. Even though the rain continued to fall, we sat on a bench in front of her apartment house and talked for hours. Then the storm moved on to the mountains in the east and we sat under disheveled racing stars and kissed. I did not know I was drenched to the skin. Delirious joy gave my conversation a glowing wit that could only have been born that evening out of the remains of a serious and cold-minded boy.

What happened to me in the succeeding years (I

can sum myself up in an oversimplification because I am not the subject of this story) might stand for the fate of most men. I settled for less than my dreams — and if for me this settlement was sweeter than not, perhaps I can say in my behalf that I had come close to realizing my promise, closer than many whose gifts were greater than mine. I wanted fame but the odds seemed to me too long, and so as an anchor to windward, I took up a new and safer life and slowly turned into a man.

That meant I walked out on the original apple of my eye, after which, the saying goes, there is never one so red, the board of sixty-four light and dark squares that fields some of life's most passionate battles — I said good-bye to it finally and forever. I married Jane. A Los Angeles newspaper hired me as a cub reporter and with that and night school I waited for her to graduate from UCLA.

I was nineteen in 1945, and while other boys my age were at war in Europe and the Pacific my life was taking form. A trick knee kept me out of the service; thanks to the knee I discovered earlier than most the delights of sex and love and fatherhood, the pleasures of good food and wine, the silences you share with someone you love very deeply. Manliness flooded through my being — and across both oceans nineteen-year-olds were dying. I tried not to think about them.

We stayed on in California until the war ended,

and when our first child, Rebecca, was born, we left the vast vacuum of the Pacific and returned to the tensions and pain of the one American city whose message is that you are alive. We settled in Greenwich Village, where four years later our first son was born — Matthew Ford Rafael. About that time a maiden aunt of my wife's left us a large inheritance, enough to ease our way for many years. I could have drifted — there was a strong inner pull to drift, to sort things out, to find myself; but instead I went to work as a writer for *Outlook*, a monthly, general feature magazine. Next came Timothy and a move, not uncommon to children of our generation, into Connecticut's countryside. For the Rafael young, for their schooling — and, of course, clear lungs. For that bright and cheerful light that beats down from a clean sky and fills the family full of fine health. Never once did I even hint to Jane that the bewildering beauty of certain country nights, with their conflagration of colors just at sunset, disturbed me deeply and left me limp and pining for the city. After all, I owed her that. She was not my first love.

In the late spring of last year, weary and yellow with an incipient liver ailment, I was recalled from Vietnam, where for five months I had been dodging bullets in order to draw up long chapters of heroism and death for my magazine. They praised my work

(though not a third of it saw print), promised me a raise and sent me off to bed. Three weeks flat on my back unloosened the coiled pain in my stomach and for further rehabilitation I fished Lake Champlain through the remainder of a muggy May. The Monday I returned to work my editor, Parker Evarts, called me into his office and whispered the name Julian Prim across his desk at me. I say whispered because Parker Evarts never spoke in quite a normal tone, even when hurling insults at you that would shake your heart.

"The chess player," I said. "Our hope to break Russia's hold on World Championships someday." I sensed that I was supposed to elaborate, but I had nothing else to say.

"*And* a born news-maker, with a very exciting, bratty personality."

"I agree with the bratty part."

"Rafe — I think I should relate a little history to you," Parker Evarts said with all the fractiousness he could convey in a whisper. "This may come as a, well, surprise. . . ." Somewhere through his vast network of sources he had exhumed my chess background, which he spilled out now with a measure of accuracy. Once I would have been surprised at the efficiency of his spy system, before I understood the meaning of survival in the palaces of Madison Avenue, but time has taught me some small truths, one being that men

always get the information they need. I denied nothing of my past — my pale flag of a smile waved faintly and I let him talk on.

"And I happen to know you once played Frank Marshall."

"Yes. He beat me."

"How old were you at the time?"

"Seven or eight. Maybe younger."

"You started playing at five?" he said.

"You have it right, Parker."

"I'm impressed. I'm very impressed. . . . Don't you care for the game any more?"

"Not very much."

"But you follow it, don't you?"

"I haven't for twenty years."

Parker Evarts chopped the air with his hand — a cruel gesture, and I knew that I had disappointed him. He cherished a warped vision of his writers as helplessly unmaterialistic men with huge brain capacities who were well informed on any subject that might suddenly absorb his interest. In my case he expected even more because I was a Jew. Jews were supposed to know more than other men.

Parker Evarts fumbled with a series of beginnings and then said, "Rafe — I want you to do a story on Prim."

"I have my hands full," I said. "There's so much work to do before I go to Paris."

"Your assignment has been changed," he said. He

waited a moment, hoping that I would say something, but I was too upset to respond, so he said unwillingly, "In August, Prim will try to take the United States Championship away from Eugene Berlin. Berlin has held it for a decade, but the boy claims he'll mop up the floor with him. He's very confident."

"You have to be," I said.

"This is no natural for a magazine with our circulation," Parker Evarts said. "I mean, who cares about chess? But I honestly do think Prim can catch the imagination of our readers. He's young, he's handsome — handsome like these new tough-looking movie stars. He's unattached. He lives for chess. As I see it, you can get all the background written by the tournament and then wrap the thing up in a few days. We can run in October." Parker Evarts spread his arms and gave an elegant little shrug. "Of course if he loses, we scrap the whole thing."

"He won't make good copy," I said. "Chess players are very negative people. They're alienated. Let's stick to Bobby Kennedy and the movie stars."

"Prim will make fine copy," Parker Evarts said. "Americans love real personalities — quotable, nasty. Especially if the personality has genius — and Prim has it. And there's something else. Informed authorities claim the Russians fear him. That angle intrigues me."

Informed Authorities. When Parker Evarts talked like a news report you knew he meant business. There

was nothing I could do then but tell the truth — tell it simply, firmly. He would pout and fume and then take me out for a drink after work and shed his animus over some new smutty story he had heard at lunch. For all his flaws he was a fundamentally decent man and he would find a way to cease being angry at me.

"I don't want to do a story on Julian Prim," I said.

"Why not?"

"Well, it's hard to know how to tell you," I said uncertainly, and hesitated.

"Would you rather put it off for a few days? I realize you just got back. Let's talk on Friday."

"No, let's talk about it now."

"All right. Talk."

"The truth is, Parker, I hate chess. When I played it I lived it, and I lived nothing else. I was a miserable human being. When I was fifteen I felt like an old man."

"So you had a trauma," Parker Evarts said. He closed his eyes and his heavy breathing told me that he was very weary with me. "I don't want to hear about it. I want you to be a good soldier and do what I say and keep the pain to yourself."

"I wasn't asking for sympathy."

"Of course you were," he corrected me quickly. "And if I let myself go I would probably cry. But if I start crying nothing will ever get done around here. Nothing. All my writers will be in here and we will

all cry all day. Now we can't run a magazine that way, can we?"

"I have missed your humor."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"The point is, Rafe, I will not put Levine on this. You're the man for Prim. You, no one else. I hate to sound like a martinet but you're giving me no choice."

"What's wrong with Levine?"

"No poetry, no hubris, no fire. He's a good reporter but you can't put him on a thing like this. Prim needs to be brought out in words, the right words. You're the wordsmith around here."

"Okay," I said. "I give up."

Parker Evarts jumped to his feet as though jerked by a wire. He crossed the room and closed the door, and came back across the room again and shook my hand and pulled me close with little pats on the back. He whispered, "I've got a feeling about this boy, a good feeling — right in the viscera." Then he pushed me away and said, "Julian Prim" — his fat fists strangled handfuls of air — "a Mozart with the soul of a beast. . . . What do you think, Rafe?"

"Nothing," I answered. "I'm paid to find out what I think."

It was late in June after a series of nagging postponements that Julian Prim finally condescended to meet me for the first time — and, of all places, in

some remote corner of seashore out beyond Brighton Beach. In a preternaturally raspy voice, with emotional edges in it that cut at you like thorns, he gave me intricate subway directions. He lost me halfway through them and when I asked him a question he repeated the directions word for word. The second time through he spoke in an exaggeratedly slow voice and enunciated his words with special clearness, the way you speak to a backward child. Curiously, when our conversation was finished and I held the connection only long enough for him to hang up first, he seemed reluctant to let me go. He asked me about Vietnam.

"Did you see anyone get killed?"

"Yes, some soldiers. And a mother and her baby."

"Were any of the soldiers Americans?"

"Only Vietnamese."

"That figures," he said. "You know, I failed my physical. I have very bad knees from a basketball injury in high school. But I wouldn't go if they tried to take me."

"Why not?"

"If you don't know, I can't tell you." And he hung up.

I arrived half an hour early at the beach and could hear the sea before I saw it. The afternoon was warm and the land wind curved along the coast in sudden bursts. It smelled of moist sand and caused the combers to roll in prolonged and tumultuous rhythms.

There were dunes at this end of the beach with coarse grass growing on them. One dune towered high above the others — this was our meeting place. I spread a blanket on the windless side and lay down on it, studying my notes for a while. Then I took off my shoes and socks and waded in the sand and let the waves roll over my ankles. The water was cold and when I came out it was nearly three-thirty. The gusts of air were turning cooler. I stretched out on the blanket, smoked a cigarette and thought over all that I knew about Julian Prim.

An hour later I awoke, blinking away the brightness of the sun which had circled the few degrees around the curve of the dune. And there he stood, staring down at me.

"You snore," he said. "I could hear you way down the beach."

For some reason his remark infuriated me out of all proportion. A fantasy flashed through my mind in which I jumped to my feet and hit him in the face and he fell to the ground, weeping and groveling for my forgiveness. I simply lay there and observed him.

"I'm late," he said.

I looked at my watch. "More than an hour, almost ninety minutes, that's all."

"I took locals all the way from Queens."

"Why did you do that?"

"The express goes too fast. It could jump the track."

"I suppose it could."

His hair was long and wild, and his eyes, which were the most brilliant shade of blue I had ever seen, blazed out of his face like the only two lights in a tough slum neighborhood. The second they focused on me they struggled to establish dominance.

We looked at each other and then he turned away and started kicking at the sand with the toe of his right sneaker, which had a hole in it the size of a quarter; he wore no socks.

"I should have stayed home."

"So go home."

The look he gave me then, hooded and violent, was too perfect not to have been practiced in a mirror, and I thought how disturbing it could be across a chessboard.

"I'm here now," he said. "I'll stick around, see how it goes."

He flopped on the blanket, on the edge farthest from me, and fished out of his windbreaker what looked like a green passport; a knight crouched on the cover stamped in gold. He snapped open the folder and stared at the miniature field of beige and dark brown squares, hand-sewn in linen. We sat in silence for at least five minutes.

Finally he said, "These sets are imported from Sweden. They cost four bucks. All professionals use them because you can work with them anywhere — like on the subway, like you're sitting there and you can focus your mind on the spatial relationships. You

just let your eye move along the squares, you look at them in various combinations, and all the time your mind is working, but not working so that you're aware of it, not really concentrating. And suddenly something may click. You see a difficult position you could never solve before and now you have an answer — you know? Sometimes I stare at the board and form an apex somewhere and just stare at it and let my mind wander. Then after a while I might visualize a game I played one time, some old complication that was going against me — but now I see into it, way deep. I see further than I ever saw before. . . . First you have a problem and what you do is search for clarity. In the end, you create clarity."

He kept his eyes trained on the pocket chess set as he talked, and when he stopped, lapsing abruptly into a trancelike abstraction, I had the curious sense that he no longer knew I was there.

We sat through another long testing silence and I watched the sea turn clamorous and begin to roll and feather with the climbing wind. White waves boiled onto the sand and dark clouds were building in the sky. I shivered inside my thin summer jacket.

I suggested we adjourn to a coffee shop at Coney Island.

"I like rough weather," he said.

"So do I if I'm dressed for it."

"Here — take my jacket."

"You keep it."

"Look," he said, staring at the pocket chess set in his lap, "you want an interview so here it is. I read an article not too long ago about the time Ted Williams stood up to the Marine Corps and the President — Eisenhower?"

"Truman, as I remember."

"Anyway, the point is, he told them off and then flew their planes and knocked a lot of Koreans out of the sky. That took guts. And in Boston, when he came back, the fans booed him. So his last time at the plate he hits one of the longest home runs of his career. The crowd goes wild. They love him. Everybody thinks Williams should tip his cap to them, give them a sign. But he sees through all that. He won't ruin his style for one sentimental gesture. Not Williams."

"You respect him."

"That was the point of my story."

"Are there any other public figures you like?"

"Yeah, Brando. I like those old Jimmy Dean movies. Sinatra. Not his singing so much. I like the way he dresses and handles women, and you feel all the time that nothing really touches him."

"What about the chess world?" I asked. "Is there anyone you're close to?"

"Paul Marcus — he's the most intelligent man I know. My best friend is Mark Friedman right now. We shoot pool together once or twice a month. Most chess players are real slobs, though. They bore me."

I asked him about Eugene Berlin. In his late forties

and the current United States Champion, Berlin was the favorite to retain his title in the Championship Tournament to be held in August, although Julian Prim was considered a strong contender. The summer before, in a characteristically dramatic move, Julian had forfeited a twenty-game, cross-country match to Berlin after five games, all of which were drawn, because of a fight with the tournament's backer. The sixth game had been set for a Tuesday in Dallas, and the backer's wife, who had other plans for the day, asked that the game be played on Wednesday. Berlin agreed but Julian Prim did not. He made it clear that his life in chess would not be spent accommodating the wives of chess patrons. The American Chess Foundation had sided with Julian, overruling the forfeiture; pressure was applied and the Dallas date was switched back to Tuesday. But Julian, still defending his principles, would not continue with the match. Victory was awarded to Berlin by default, along with the trophy and five hundred dollars in prize money.

When I mentioned Berlin's name Julian looked at me for the first time since taking out his chessboard, and his eyes took me in detail by detail as though I were a problem to solve.

"Berlin is good," he said. "Very good."

"I understand that you and Berlin are not close."

"That's a nice way to put it. We hate each other."

"Do you think you can win the United States Tournament?"

"Yes." He lowered his eyes to the board again. "Look, this is going to sound like bragging — when people read it, it will. But I happen to know that right now, at nineteen, I am number one in this country. I am one of the top five in the world, and I have a chance to become the greatest player of all time."

"Better than Morphy? Better than Capablanca?"

"You better believe it," he said. "I am telling you the truth."

"How long has Berlin held the title?" I asked.

"Nine years out of the last ten. He didn't defend one year. But put my prediction in your story. By the time it's printed — when did you say?"

"In the fall."

"By then I'll be a seer. A prophet."

"I promise to put it in," I told him.

"I really want you to," he said. "Berlin plays boring chess. Art is beyond him. He is a fat shopkeeper who thinks the world will end if he forgets to eat kosher, and you can put that in the story too. I don't care." Julian's eyes flashed at me indignantly.

I let that remark pass and Julian told me what he thought of Spassky, Petrosyan, Smyslov and Tahl. They were the great Russian masters and he would murder them. They would fall like patzers and he would become famous and rich and buy his clothes tailor-made in all the great cities — London, Paris, Rome — and move in the circle of international play-

boys and drive a Mercedes-Benz or maybe a Rolls Royce and sail in a yacht through the warm and beautiful places of this earth. He would be the chess champion of the world and it would be his bounden duty to live like the number one man.

The deserted beach was beginning to look barren, moonlike, and reaching down the curve of the shore into the first shades of twilight the line of surf was a dark vein on the sand. I could not hide my shivering any more. Just as I was about to suggest again that we leave, Julian jumped to his feet and stretched and then ran down to the water and let the waves spill over his feet. He picked up a handful of stones and pointed to a pale rock rising now out of the receding tide. He handed me some stones and told me to stand beside him and we would see which of us could hit the rock most often.

I had always enjoyed playing games with my sons, and felt proud when they asked me to join them, but I was reluctant to compete against Julian. He would play to win and I already knew that I would not like to lose to him. On the other hand this might be a way to shed some of our constraint.

He possessed a strong throwing arm and his first stone sailed over the rock more than two hundred feet out. It took a complete sacrifice of accuracy for me to reach the rock at all — I never came close to hitting it. Julian hit the rock three times and for a moment he seemed almost happy.

But in the Coney Island coffee shop, garishly lighted and roaring jukebox tunes, he was violently shorn of all good humor and his answers became increasingly uncommunicative. I was getting tired of him. The day had been a long and tiring one for me, and I came out from behind the faceless role of professional interviewer, stabbing for chinks in his armor.

"You haven't talked about your parents, Julian."

"I'm here to answer questions. Ask, I'll answer."

"I understand your mother was a beautiful woman."

"She was. Yes."

"She died — how long — six years ago?"

"Yes," he said. "One week after my thirteenth birthday."

"How old was she?"

"Thirty-five," he said.

We sat in silence until I finally said, "Julian, this is going to be a tough story to do if you don't give a little more. Elaborate some. Yes and no doesn't give me much to go on."

"Okay, I can elaborate. There was the cancer my mother had. I can elaborate on that. When it finished with her she weighed sixty pounds. It started in her stomach and spread everywhere. Her skin turned yellow and her hair fell out and all she did for the last few weeks was cry. I sat beside her bed and played chess." He looked at me. "Are you writing it down in my words?"

"That's my job."

"Well, people wonder what you feel when your mother dies. It wasn't what I felt then but later — I was angry at her for something that could not be her fault, seeing that she was dead. But the funeral director. He was the man — he was the good artist who left the coffin open so you could see his cosmetics on her. I almost vomited when I looked at her. I was very angry with her for looking like that. So dead."

He spoke in a reasonable matter-of-fact tone, as though I were a novice to whom he was explaining the rules of chess. Sometimes between sentences he would sip iced tea through a straw and study the plastic kings on his little board. "This white king here," he said with no transition, "has what is known in chess as the opposition. You know what that means?"

"I'm afraid not," I lied.

"Well, you see the number of squares separating the kings is odd and odd is always the winning factor. In this case, three squares. Black moves. He is forced either to two or four squares or else off the file — either way he gives the opposition to white." He looked at a clock on the wall and said, "I have an appointment at eight-thirty."

"Just a few more questions."

"Fire away."

"Do you have a girl friend?"

"A girl friend? No. What kind of a question is that?"

"I know it sounds insipid to you. But *Outlook* and *Chess Review* have different audiences, remember."

"Well, I don't have a girl friend," he said and he looked more sullen than ever.

"Do you date any girls?"

"Dates are what you eat. I don't know about any other kind of dates."

"Don't you like girls?"

"Say look, if you're trying to make a pass at me, forget it. I hate fairies, and old fairies are the worst. . . ." I must have looked shocked because he burst out laughing and said, "I'm kidding — I'm only joking. To answer your question, girls, women, whatever — they're all the same to me. Most of what they say belongs in cartoon strips with balloons full of exclamation points. Even my mother — she was brighter than most of them but she prattled all the time. They all bore me."

"At nineteen girls should begin to interest you."

"Don't worry about me," he said.

I told him I wouldn't. Then: "Do you have any close friends, Julian?"

"No. Not my age. I don't hide anything. There is no need for friends if you don't have secrets."

"I see." I wrote that answer down word for word, and then I asked him about his father.

"We get along," Julian said. "He goes his way, I go mine."

"You share an apartment."

"For now. Yes."

"What does your father do?"

"He's a lawyer."

"What kind of practice does he have?"

"I don't know. I never asked him."

"Does he have any role in your chess career — is he interested in it?"

"The financial side. Yes. That's the side that interests him. I think he has a very strong interest in the financial side. You might even say he would like to live off me. You know, retire. But of course we won't say that in *Outlook*."

"No," I said. "We won't say that."

He started drumming his fingers on the table. "One more tea," he said, "then I have to go."

"Okay. Just let me get a few more facts. You played your first game at seven?"

"Eight. My Uncle Phil — my mother's brother — he bought me a toy set for my birthday and taught me the moves. He was a real patzer, though, and after a month or so I could beat him. Then at nine, ten, somewhere in there, I just gave it up, threw the set away."

"What was the reason?"

"Model planes. I started building model planes, all kinds. Hundreds of them. The thing is, when I quit chess I was pretty good but a lot of kids I played were better. People misunderstand. They think I was a child prodigy like Berlin. I wasn't. I was just a kid

with a feeling for the game who really preferred building model planes."

"When did you go back to chess?"

"Oh, about a year later."

"What made you go back?"

"Well, I looked at a board one day, and all kinds of things were clear for the first time. It was like a game I had never played before. So I started going to Solovey's — you know, the teacher? — and I was hooked. I haven't thought about much else since."

"How much influence did Solovey have over you at the beginning?"

"You better ask him. Whatever he tells you will be true."

"I've heard you two have a feud."

"There's no feud," said Julian. "Things just aren't the same between us."

"Do you know why?"

He gave me a long glance and then looked away. "I have never been able to figure that out," he said.

It was clear from my research that Julian's chess background was excellent and that he owed a lot to Jacob Solovey. He had begun his serious apprenticeship at ten, and by the time he started high school he could read Russian texts, not only skillfully enough to decipher the Cyrillic script and the chess notations, but also to master such asides as *White stands well.* Solovey was responsible for this and for Julian Prim's exceptional knowledge of opening-game theory. And

now something had happened between them. I looked forward to meeting the old man.

When we left the coffee shop we strolled slowly down the boardwalk. The sea was white with moonlight. Alabaster waves fell into the lights of the shore — crumbling columns from Coney Island's past. I stopped to stare out at the ocean, to feel the raw breeze on my face. With a swift roar, white waves charged in from the sea, and the end of one wave, in a glancing run, shot up near the boardwalk.

"A beautiful night," I said.

But Julian Prim did not hear me. He was twenty feet ahead, staring down at his feet, and walking fast.

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As THE 9:57 poked out to Connecticut, past borders of warm evening windows that flowered white and gold on the gentle hills, I thought of Paris and of all the pleasure I would miss because of Julian Prim. Spread out on my briefcase were the notes I had taken — senseless scrawls. Julian was a withdrawn boy, an unfriendly boy, and very assured, and something had made him bitter. Beyond that and the fact of his talent, I knew nothing.

My respect for the truth is precious to me — I am that much of a Jewish puritan — and it is true to say that Julian Prim frightened me. I saw in him what I might have been, and he made me keenly aware of the suburban nature of my life. I own a large house, we are zoned for four acres, my children are gentle and have the manners of the rich — and I feel the timorousness of too many uneasy memories. . . .

Perhaps I did not want to write about someone who could face the darkness of his gifts. It would not be easy to write about Julian Prim if he diminished me in my own eyes.

The following day I stayed in the country and assembled the skeleton of the story so that its focus would be the United States Championship Tournament in August. I assumed, as did everyone in the chess world, that Julian Prim would score well, possibly even win out over Berlin. I planned my story to build up to whatever climax would come and then let his position in the final standings, along with suitable comments for the laity on his play, form my conclusions.

At four that afternoon I was supposed to call Julian Prim at his apartment in Queens. The work had not gone well. My first sketches of him had all the pale eloquence and condescension that have made the *New Yorker* the darling of prose couturiers everywhere. I was guilty of manipulating the facts in order to make Julian my target into which I could drive all my most poisonous darts. But the Julian Prim I had met at the beach owned an inner life of untrammeled ferocity; he breathed it on you like dragon fire. There was an enchantment about him, and if you came too close you were certain to be burned and haunted. Perhaps forever. That was the Julian Prim I had to rise up to meet.

As Jane tiptoed down the hall so as not to disturb

me I sat rigid in the study and experienced that awful hardening of the flesh — fear. With an effort of will I pushed myself up from the chair and walked over to the window. Outside, the pasture was cheerfully green and the barn gleamed white in the sun. Rebecca's Karmann Ghia was parked beside the barn door. That meant she was home from her summer courses, a fact which reminded me, a little mournfully, of her academic plight. My eyes traveled up to the blue sky fringed with scalloped clouds, and I thought about Rebecca, her sunny disposition, her beauty, her stealthy grace that could make me so uneasy — and I wondered how she had come to be mine and what all of us were doing out here in this prudent Connecticut countryside.

I might as well say it right out — my children have been disappointments to me. I never stopped loving them, and I would give up my life to save theirs with a grateful shout of joy, but they were not the offspring of my imagination. They were children of the morning world, who lived in a bright circle of healthy thoughts and extroverted acts. Jane had assumed the function of representing them to me, and so she appeared more like them than she actually was. But I knew this woman I had married. I knew that behind her mother's mask she had her share of darkness and fire. She had the gentle eyes and trembling nerves that suggest biographies like ours — all of us who have been broken and mended many times through

the years. But I was afraid that my children had invented conformity as a perfect avenue of escape from us, and while I was proud of them for finding their way in their world I was full of dread that they might do no more than skim the surface of themselves.

Julian Prim was responsible for this line of thought because I recognized in him my old painful self-consciousness, my devotion to chess, my difficult and lonely pride. My children were cut from strange cloth, and I had to fight hard to accomplish the reality of being a father to them.

At four o'clock I dialed Julian Prim's apartment.

He came on and said, "The story is out. You can forget about it."

"Why? What's the matter?" I asked.

"You didn't tell me you were a chess player. I found out last night."

"So?"

"You should have told me."

"I quit twenty years ago," I said. "Before you were born. I wasn't so good and I'm surprised anyone remembers."

"There's going to be no story now. I wouldn't touch it. You lied to me."

"I did not."

"Sure you lied. You lied then and you're lying now. All writers lie." He was very angry.

"I withheld information, Julian. I admit that. But you can't say I lied."

"I can," he said, "and I do."

I let him talk on and work some of his anger out, and then I said, "It's me you're mad at, not *Outlook*. Take my advice and let someone else do this story on you. It can help your career. The magazine feels you symbolize something new in our society. More and more kids go into science, the bright ones are pulled in that direction — they have intellectual values. If anyone can make chess a spectator sport in this country, you can. That is the magazine's opinion, and I agree with it."

"I don't like you," he said.

I smiled at the telephone. "Then work with another writer."

"Writers are writers."

"Not necessarily."

"Look," he said, "I'm a chess player, not a movie star. Movie stars you ask personal questions of. They thrive on it. You treat them like idiots and idiots read about them. But a chess player — nobody cares if he sleeps on nails facing east, or what he does. The whole thing in chess is talent. Nothing else matters."

"Julian," I said, "maybe you're right. But maybe I'm right too. I should have been more candid with you, I agree with you there. Let's have another meeting and see if we can't iron things out."

"I don't see why I should."

"Well, for your career if for no other reason."

"*Outlook* can't help me."

"Don't be too sure."

"They like to gun down celebrities," he said. "They get nasty."

"I won't write about you that way," I said. I felt that his mood might be changing and so I asked him how he had made out last night at the Gotham Chess Club.

"I picked up some coins in a blindfold session," he said. "Then a few of us played blitz until around midnight. I like blitz. I was playing against eight or ten guys, moving fast and setting some fantastic traps. I was sadistic last night. I murdered one guy, a pet hate of mine, Levy — he thinks he's a genius and he's only a member because his father has money. So this schlemiel, Levy, he thought he had me pinned with his knight, and then I gave him a double check, one of them concealed — mate to follow in three moves. So I say, 'Mate in three, idiot,' and he looks at the board and sees it for the first time. His eyes pop open and he almost cries. I like to get savage with certain people. Once they know you have the power, they start to die."

"Julian," I said, "I want to see you tomorrow."

"What for?"

"We could leave early in the morning for Brooklyn and walk through the neighborhood where you grew up."

"Say, you ask me all kinds of questions. Can I ask you one?"

"Sure. Go ahead."

"Are you a Jew?"

"Technically."

"What do you mean by technically?"

"I don't know what I mean," I said. We both laughed. "I guess I am and yet I don't feel that I am."

"I understand," he said.

"Will you meet me, Julian? We can have beer and a sandwich in Brownsville."

"I don't drink liquor."

"You can have whatever you want."

"Pitkin Avenue," he said. "Now there's an avenue. I can already smell the piss and taste the halvah and see all those synagogues. That lousy Brownsville — it suffocates me."

"I would like to walk around with you."

"Okay. But the story — remember this. The story is about a chess player named Julian Prim. Not the other way around."

"All right."

"My life is chess. Without chess I am nothing."

"I'll remember."

"Just make sure you do."

The ringing phone shattered my sleep at seven o'clock the next morning, and in groping for it I dropped the receiver and cut the connection. I cursed. Then I replaced the receiver on its hook with the

punctilious movements of a drunk trying to pass as sober. I lay waiting for Julian Prim to call again to say that he had changed his mind, for I was certain that he had called, having decided not to go on with the story. The second time the telephone rang I was surprised to hear a burst of queer melody fill my ear, part Cockney, part Yiddish, with something of the wistful sweetness of old show tunes. The sentences were all of one stress and sounded rehearsed:

"This is Julian Prim's residence. He cannot keep his appointment with you today because of a previous engagement. He will contact you in the near future."

That was all and yet I looked at the receiver and waited for something else to come out of it. Then, "Hello," I said. "Hello?"

"Yes?" The voice was smaller now, as though terraced by a sudden fright.

"Is this Mr. Prim?"

There was a long silence.

"He*llo?*" I said.

"Yes?"

"Am I speaking to Julian Prim's father?"

"This — I am Benjamin Prim. My — ah, Julian. He wanted for me to leave this message. Ah — he cannot keep his appointment with you today because of a previous engagement. He will contact you in the near future. . . ."

"Mr. Prim," I said.

"There is nothing more. Nothing more."

"Mr. Prim, I want to see you. Can I come to your office?"

"No — no. I am out of this. I stay completely out. Oh, no! He is Master Prim, I am not in his business, you understand. No. I have nothing to say."

"Please, I would like to —"

"Good-bye."

"Listen —"

"Mister, I am paying for this call long-distance!"

"Mr. Prim . . . Mr. Prim!" I kept shouting into the receiver, but he had hung up.

No one answered at Julian's apartment and none of the five boroughs listed a business telephone number for a Benjamin Prim. I called my researcher, a bright Smith girl named Bucky Seton, but she had no information on Julian's father beyond the bare facts — lawyer, widower, born in London in 1900.

"Please work on it, Bucky."

"Okay."

"Find out what he does specifically. Something strange is going on."

"Right."

"I won't be in today. After I finish my work here I'll drive out to Brownsville. I want to interview Jacob Solovey, the old man who runs the chess club where Prim got his start."

"He may know about the father."

"He doesn't," I said. "I asked him that on the phone. Who else should I see out there?"

"Well, there's Prim's high school principal. Zimmerman, Herbert Zimmerman. His home address is 227 Chester Street. My sense of him is, he takes a very proprietary interest in Prim and wants people to think he and the boy were close. But he didn't tell me that Prim was suspended twice in his freshman year."

"What for?"

"Not attending classes, insubordination. I brought it up but Zimmerman quickly glossed over it. He has a lot of drug and delinquent problems in his school, and now he has a chance to take credit for a famous graduate. He won't mess it up."

"You stay with him, Bucky. He might give you something usable. I can take him on later if you need me."

"Right," she said. "Bye-bye."

I drove to Brooklyn through a heavy rain, and by the time I reached Brownsville a northerly wind had blown the thundershower out to sea. There were hundreds of clouds in the sky — clouds of silver, clouds of gold, clouds the color of bone and dust. The storm had left a stinging chill in the air, and I drove along slowly with the car windows rolled up and looked at this place of low cruel architecture, of sallow flatlands, of stone monuments, subway car barns. Brownsville had changed since I had been here before; it had started to grow rich. There were new housing projects and new schools — all built in the

shape of Kleenex boxes. I did not like the new elegance and I wondered what would be lost along with the wooden tenements, the Fatima signs, the old men with flat Eastern faces — probably Brownsville would lose its bad reputation, the Slavic look would blend and soften, the gaiety of a closed community would vanish — all replaced by these clean geometrical buildings, these cold transformations innocent of memory and pain. Then Brownsville would be haunted no longer. It would just be another town.

I must have asked directions half a dozen times until finally, on a reasonably decent block of Bristol Street, I saw the sign hanging from a strand of copper wire: SOLOVEY CHESS PARLOR. WELCOME. I parked and locked the car and felt the ocean air cut deeply at my flesh.

A little man, less than five feet tall, answered my knock so quickly that he must have been standing behind the door. He had pink cheeks and white hair and a grieving beauty in his expression, as though life had badgered him for seventy years without leaving a trace of bitterness. Red suspenders held up trousers that were much too large for him and his shirt with wide blue stripes had no collar. Sucking vigorously on a cold pipe, he extended his hand. His grip was firm and dry. He did not smile.

"Come along," he said. "We will sit in the parlor. I keep it tolerably warm."

We walked down a dark hall into a bright room

full of books and smelling of sweet tobacco and dust. We sat in straight chairs with a striking mahogany chess table between us. For a moment I looked around the room while he looked at me.

"So Julian will have his face on the cover of *Outlook*. That is an honor for him. Only nineteen."

"Yes," I said.

"If you like, we can play a game while we talk."

"I am not a chess player," I said and then quickly added, "Once, long ago, but I gave it up."

"I remember your name. Francis Rafael. Twenty, thirty years ago."

"I was not good enough," I said, "so I quit."

He nodded. "An excellent reason. Most of us second-raters, we lack the willpower to follow your example."

"You have a beautiful chess table, Mr. Solovey." I ran my hand over the smooth inlaid squares.

"It belonged to Capablanca. He left it to me."

"You must have been close friends."

"Yes — we had a fine friendship. Capa trusted me. He often called me the greatest chess annotator in this country. But of course we never played, I never tried to compete with him. That made our friendship possible, I think. I was the teacher and student. Capa — for ten years, maybe longer, the greatest chess player in the world."

"And you never played him?"

"Well, one time only. When my wife was still

living — she died two years before he did, maybe more, my memory for dates is vague. In those days Capa would come out sometimes after the tournament grind — eat supper, spend the night. Once we drank a bottle of wine and he became quite gay. 'Jacob,' he said to me, 'you take the white pieces, I will remove my queen's rook and knight from the board and I will make ten-second moves.' "

Jacob Solovey laughed and waved his hand toward the bookshelves.

"So I said to him, 'With my book knowledge, who can beat me?' I used to kid Capa — I called him Italianer. And I said, 'Okay, Italianer, I will perform with excellence and leave you deeply shaken.' I didn't last twenty moves, to be honest with you, but it was great fun."

The way Solovey described the challenge, especially his imitation of Capablanca's voice issuing it, reminded me of Julian Prim throwing stones at the rock — the same imperative need to consummate victory again and again, each time for the first time, over some unending and oppressive force.

"Where would you rate Capablanca among the great masters?" I said.

"That is not easy. In my opinion, there was never a man with more logic and courage. But the game changed so much between Morphy's time and Capa's. The importance of position play, for instance, and all

the new analysis. What if their best years had coincided?" Solovey smiled and shrugged. "Speculation. The point is, chess has been blessed with superb artists — Alekhine was an exciting genius. So were Steinitz and Lasker. You cannot leave them out of the equation." Solovey puffed on his cold pipe imperturbably. "And nowadays you have Berlin, Friedman, the Sturdivant brothers, a handful of Russians. Others. . . ." His voice trailed off.

"And Julian Prim," I said.

"Ah — Julian. You came to talk about Julian, to hear what his old melamed has to tell. And here I rattle on." He rubbed the bowl of his pipe along his nose and sat very still. Then at last, "Julian is a difficult subject," he announced solemnly. "He was far and away the best student I ever had. He was like starlight and I was a moth drawn to his brilliance." Solovey shook his head slowly. "It was poetry I felt. So often I wished Capa was alive so I could talk to him about this boy. I never dreamed I would find one like him. I was like a fight manager with his stable of bums — then one day a boy walks in off the street, he has the nerves, the instincts. . . . You know right off he can move all the way to the top. That was Julian.

"He absorbed all I had to offer, he sucked me dry. And he could be so ruthless. Ah — you don't know! I would say something and he would discard it in the coldest way, I can't tell you. Almost from the start —

just an eleven-year-old — he knew my weaknesses. I could not teach him to play, that was built into his bones. My job was to arouse his genius.

"Already his games had a stamp of their own. He made his move. The combination developed. You watched and said, 'But of course! Precisely right!' The game would continue, complications developing. Julian would spread out, combine, simplify — finally the winning position was right there so you could see it, and you would say, 'Yes — now I see. Obviously there is no other way.' And yet after you sat and thought about the game, you also had to ask yourself, 'Yes — but how on earth did he do it?' "

Jacob Solovey picked up a white pawn and rolled it around in the palm of his hand. "Today in a field of such cautious talent he is a daring player — *the* daring player. And he wins. Even when his position seems lost he can find an attack — in that way he's like Alekhine. But he can defend better than Alekhine did, much better, and when you get right down to it his style is his own. Like nobody's. All you can say is, his games don't have many dead stretches in them — he often seems to be losing, but then he makes that crucial move that no one else saw. There have been delicate masters, brutal masters — Alekhine's game was basically brutal. Capa was a cold mathematical master. I would call Julian a cunning master.

"I will be very honest with you, Mr. Rafael. It is a fact that Julian has been the best thing in my life.

And the worst. Both." A vague smile trembled on Solovey's lips, though some quality in it, and in his eyes, seemed reminiscent and ruined.

"Let me see. The first time I saw him he wore short pants and long stockings. Little Lord Fauntleroy — his hair too long and the beautiful expression of a girl child. The hardness was just coming into his eyes. An uncle of his who used to own a paint business not far from here, this uncle brought him in to play me. I forget the gentleman's name; we were not acquainted — he just walked in and started raving about the boy's ability. He went into a long speech — the boy was a genius, a prodigy, another Berlin. The uncle was a fool — real meshuggener. I can still see Julian. He stood in the corner, wanting to be swallowed in the shadows. He kept putting his hands over his eyes. I never saw a more tense and miserable boy.

"So I said to him, 'You want to play?'

"He would not say one word to me.

"His uncle said, 'All right, you came here to play, so play.'

"Julian still said nothing. But his face was all flushed and he walked over to the chess table, walking differently than when he came in — swinging his shoulders like he had to act brave."

Jacob Solovey broke off to light his pipe. He puffed hard and a pale turban of smoke unwound toward the ceiling. He continued, "So we sat down at this table, the boy and I did. I knew the uncle made him

nervous and I said, 'Why don't you wait in the living room?' No, he wouldn't do that. Not that shmendrik of an uncle. He expected to be entertained.

"Julian was shaking with nerves and I offered him the white pieces. Ah! His response I will never forget if I live to be a hundred. I can see his face now. He gave me the most cynical look — the kind of look you might give a foolish child or woman. He said to me, 'You offer me an advantage. Why do you do that?'

"I told him I thought it was the decent thing to do. He and I looked at each other for a moment in silence, and there was a hard look in his eyes. I could see contempt. He shrugged his shoulders like an old man and said, 'Decent maybe you are. But you can't play chess on decency. . . .' And this from a boy so young and inexperienced in life. I didn't know whether to laugh or lecture!

"So anyway, he took white and opened with the queen's pawn — which will surprise you if you know anything about his career. Julian has never once used the queen's pawn opening in a tournament game — never. Maybe I have an old man's fantasy — I could be all wrong, but I can't help feeling the root of it was in that game he played me. I hadn't intended to confuse him — I was testing his knowledge of openings, more than anything. Well, anyway, I answered with the Benoni Counter Gambit. It was new to him and his response was poor. Poor and

confused. The drift of his moves was uncertain. But I soon saw he had a plan — and for a boy that age a plan is remarkable. Any plan is. Good, poor. As I remember it, he wanted to keep me from moving my knight to king rook three, which would lead to further complications. But he threw away a valuable tempo, maybe two, in doing this. He still had a chance to admit his error but he persisted in it."

Solovey launched a smoke ring toward the ceiling and stared at it thoughtfully until it flattened out.

"But then I saw the trap. It seemed he was giving me a pawn, but three moves later I would lose my knight. I studied the position a long time, going over all the possibilities. I did not want to lose to a child. I had taken life too cheerfully and drifted into a very poor position, but there must be a way out. I had to find one. . . .

"I think he thought I was a fool, the cold way he sat there looking at me. He had that stare of his even then, that x-ray stare. So, I took a lot of time, and I saw a gamble that might work out. I exchanged a bishop for two pawns and my other bishop for a knight and a pawn. That way I got a solid king-side attack and I beat him in a tight end game.

"When Julian knew he was beaten, he jumped to his feet and shouted, 'You didn't win, I lost! I threw the game away!' He banged his fists on the table and I remember the pieces flew all around. Some fat nerve, I thought. The boy has no manners, and the uncle —

he's just as bad. I was ready to throw them both out.

"Then the uncle told him to shut up and stop being a poor loser.

"Julian turned on him, and I remember his face was as white as any face I have ever seen. Like chalk. 'You want me to be a good loser?' he said. 'Just like Papa? Is that what you want?'

"The uncle, he told him to shut up again, and I told the uncle he had better restrain himself. Things were very unpleasant by that time.

"And then Julian started to cry. He stood there, doubled over, and held his hands up to his face. I led his uncle out of the room. Ten minutes, fifteen minutes later Julian came out and said, 'I'm ready for another game. . . .'"

Jacob Solovey hesitated, then lapsed into silence.

"Did you play him again?" I asked.

"Not then. The following week, though, he came back and we played the same game over. The second time he had a clever variation. I could see he had studied the game, going over each separate part for stress. But he lost. He wasn't seeing ahead that far in those days — I pinned his queen." Jacob Solovey smiled.

"So I said to him, 'Julian, in this situation your idea does not work. Your ideas must always be changing, adapting. You must be flexible.'

" 'I see that now — the inaccuracy. But I had to find out.'

"Well, a few weeks went by. I continued to play him, and I won. He won maybe once or twice. The games were close but my experience counted for a lot, and I could still fool him with a new opening. But they came harder and harder, my victories. And all through this period he never showed any emotion, not after that first time. He took his lickings and he made notes. He kept coming back for more.

"After maybe a month he came to me one day and said he wanted to go through all the books in my chess library. I told him, sure. I was proud of him. So from then on he practically lived here. From school he would come like clockwork. I taught him all the Russian and German he knows — enough to follow the texts. He used to sit on that low stool right there, a little board on his lap, poring through the books and playing out game after game.

"We did not play any more. Not once. When he wasn't studying he would ask me questions about Capa. Not just chess questions — everything. Was he powerful? Did he like women? How good a baseball player was he? Capa had become his hero.

"Then he came one Sunday, one very snowy day I remember, and he was all dressed up. He had such a solemn face, small and dark, and those blue eyes burning through you — and that day the look in his eyes was full of hate.

" 'Today is my birthday,' he said. 'I'm thirteen, Professor. I want to play you a game.'

"So I said all right and we sat down, and the game was over almost before it began. I have to tell you he slaughtered me. This game showed me something — it showed Julian could become a great master. If his body and character were made of iron, he could go all the way. I was so proud I almost wept. . . .

"The moment he finished the game he got up and put on his coat to go. I offered him some seltzer, a glass of tea.

" 'I have to go home now,' he said. 'My mother is dying.'

"Then he turned away from me and left. I felt very bad about the boy, but I knew he didn't want my help. A few days later I read the death notice in the paper. Just thirty-five she was. What a pity! I wrote a note of condolence to Julian. No answer came. Two, three weeks went by, Julian did not come. Finally one afternoon he arrived, acting just like always. Full of chutzpa. Things went on as before, except we did not play. We never played another game. He was too good — I knew it, he knew it."

"Mr. Solovey, I understand there is a feud between you and Prim. Is that true?"

The old man shook his head no. He started to speak, then was silent, and I guessed at some unutterable disappointment. But later he returned to it and said, "A year ago Julian and his father left Brooklyn. He had stopped coming here a few months before that — I'm not sure there was anything more

for me to give him. His name was growing. The money was beginning to come in." Solovey shook his head as though agreeing with himself. "I dislike self-pity — but I can tell you one thing. A sudden break like that, it takes something out of you. You don't feel good. When people ask me about it, I shrug it off. There were no fights, no big differences. Nothing. He just didn't come one day. I kept waiting, but he hasn't come yet."

I picked up a knight and rolled it around in my fingers. Smiling, Solovey said, "You remind me of a funny thing Julian did, a typical thing maybe. It was at the beginning, when he first began coming here — maybe the first time he came by himself. We sat down to play and he picked up a knight and pushed it across the table, up close to my face. 'Behold, a white knight!' he said. 'And its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. . . .' I asked him what the quote came from and he told me Revelation. His mother had read him the New Testament when he was a small child, all of it — and parts of it over and over. Revelation was always his favorite, he said — especially the passage with the knight and the going out to conquer.

"Later, I borrowed a New Testament to look up the passage. The writing bewildered me. It was — I guess you would say mystic. But Julian is not like most chess players, and he was different from most boys

whether they played chess or not. This mystic side was always there. Anyway, I found the passage, and it was, Behold, a white *horse*. He'd got it wrong. When I told him he gave me one of his x-ray stares and said, "But a horse is a knight, Professor. Do I have to tell you? Only patzers call them horses. . . .' Try as I might, I couldn't persuade him different."

We laughed. Jacob Solovey rose slowly from his chair and walked over to a roll-top desk. He removed a letter from a pigeonhole and brought it over to me.

"I want you to read this," he said. "Julian wrote me just this once. Maybe it explains. I don't know. I'm an old man — there's no getting around it. I'm old. But philosophy and wisdom are still only words to me. And religion. I don't have any of those comforts." He smiled. "I will make you a glass of tea."

"Thank you. I miss drinking good tea."

"Good and strong. Plenty of sugar."

"I like it that way," I said.

I opened the letter when he left the room. Inside was a Christmas card. It was conventionally religious — Jesus in the manger smothered in lace embroidery, the wise men circled around the cradle with beatification stamped on their faces, Mary with her praying hands clasped under her chin, Joseph holding his cape close to his breast smiling at the baby through his beard, both Joseph and Mary supporting in their holiness huge golden haloes over their heads, and the following message on the inside left fold printed in

spiritual silver script: ". . . *lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them* . . . MATTHEW 2:9." On the opposite fold, in traditional red and green: "MAY THE JOY AND PEACE OF THE HOLY CHRISTMAS SEASON CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE NEW YEAR!" Julian had scrawled a message on the back.

> Professor, has anyone ever sent you a Christmas card before? Do not take it wrong. What I have to say should not be poisoned by your thinking I have tried to make a fool of you. The birth of Christ has what most people want. The father and the mother and the wise men and the child surrounded by them all. All of them straight and perfect and pure like angels. I suppose most people need that. They need to be surrounded.
>
> I have to talk to you, Professor. I don't know how to say what I have to say. You have been generous. You have given me your knowledge and time and all. You have been a good teacher to me. I'm trying to pull my thoughts together but it's hard.
>
> I have been losing games this whole week. A strange spell has been on me . . .

(With this sentence Julian ran out of space. The letter continued on a separate sheet of paper.)

> I felt great all week up until today. I was walking on air. For three nights I had the same dream. I was an eagle and the cities beneath me were my

kingdom. I was an ancient monarch with wings that cast shadows for miles. Everybody feared me down below. I laughed and laughed and I really loved myself. Then I would wake up and I still felt great. No one could beat me. I was the greatest master of them all. I would never lose another game of chess as long as I lived. I dreamed that too. Who could beat the great eagle? Well, pretty soon I was in this idiot's fog and the dream kept coming every night and it bothered me when I was awake. I could not concentrate on the actual positions during play. I mean I was like my opponent looking at me and saying I did not need to worry because no one could beat me. I lost Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Now I am coming out of it and I hate myself. I really do. Today I could die.

It all has something to do with our friendship. I don't know anyway to put it except I feel surrounded. It bothers me all the time. I think you are in love with me. You want for me the way a father wants for his son. You look at me with moist eyes. You ruffle my hair and preen over me. And more and more I get this hollow feeling inside, like you expect something from me I cannot give.

Professor, I have to walk by myself. I am eighteen and I just got out of high school. I cannot let you crawl inside my guts. I have to go on alone to whatever lies ahead. As grateful as I am for

everything you have done and all, I cannot continue with our relationship and live.

Good-bye,
JULIAN PRIM

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Julian came to my office far up in the sky on Park Avenue late the following Friday afternoon. The appointment had been made for four o'clock the day before, but he had phoned on my trunk line after the switchboard closed down at five-thirty to say that he had a blinding headache. His voice had been cold and seemed to armor, as always, some awful vulnerability.

I have grown too old to think that I can understand the emotions of others, and all I could do was feel sad for him. Success restricts like failure, perhaps more. I had little of public account to show for my years, but I could still experience an uprush of joy with the coming of spring; I could cry out all my bliss at the onslaught of sexual passion; I could cringe in the blue heart of an autumn storm, strangely uplifted by portents of my own mortality. Julian Prim did not

live that way. He had told his only friend, a gray old man with few remaining hopes, that he did not need him any more. He had submitted his powers to the waging of war, and I envied him for his limitation and his power, and I feared him and I felt sad for him. And I felt sad for me. When Julian Prim did arrive he was an hour late, and I let him know that I was angry.

He flung himself onto the couch, curling his legs over the armrest. He wore a dark silk suit, a dark shirt with a white silk tie and black pointed shoes with tassels — suitable attire for a young mobster on the rise. He immediately drew out his pocket chess set and the surface of his eyes assumed the scaly dimness I had seen in them before as he moved out into abstraction, their color changing from blue to malachite. Ten minutes passed as he stared at the board. I smoked a cigarette and stared at him. At last, without looking up, he said, "I have a surprise for you."

"That's fine," I said. "But don't rub your heels on the sofa."

Slowly he raised his legs and planted them on the floor.

"Sensitivity interests me," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Your face always shows what you feel. In the chess world we're all sphinxes."

"All right," I said. "What about my feelings?"

"You're mad."

"I have every right to be."

"Okay," he said. "I guess you do."

"Is that supposed to be an apology?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"You are such a gracious young man," I said.

But he had looked down at his board again. He made a number of moves rapidly and then said, "About my surprise. I am coming out to your house to stay for a while — I mean if it's convenient." His smile was sarcastic, and the lines descending from the wings of his nose struck me as tentative from lack of use.

I stared at him and tried to think of what to say.

"You told me you have a big place and two kids are at camp. So?" He spread his arms and shrugged, hunching up his shoulders in a way that reminded me of Jacob Solovey. "Be logical. You want your story, I need some peace and quiet. This town is getting on my nerves. We all live in an exhaust pipe around here."

"Come out to our house," I said. "You can stay as long as you want to."

"Okay, I will. I'm in bad shape right now. I can't sleep. Most of the time I have the light on and work out chess problems. My eyes twitch a lot, and lately I've had headaches all the way down into my neck. I have to go into training."

Julian told me that he had learned from Jacob Solovey how to train for a long tournament. Before

the Detroit Open a year ago, Julian had spent three weeks in Miami. He drove chess completely out of his mind. No board, no books, not even any of those mental games that could swell the brain to an unhealthy heaviness. Every morning he rose between six and seven and walked along the beach for an hour before breakfast. He slept both morning and afternoon. He kept to a simple diet of red meat, greens, oranges and ice cream. Water and milk were the only liquids he touched. Those days, one after another, each fitting smoothly into the next, formed long silences broken only by an occasional conversation with someone pushing to get close. Sometimes a guest at the hotel where he stayed would make an approach — once. He would listen politely for a moment, then turn his back and walk away.

Afternoons in Miami, there would be wind sprints up and down the warm dark-golden sand — push-ups, rope skipping, swimming. When the pale grape of dusk spanned the sky he would watch westerns on television or listen to Bach's "Goldberg Variations," sitting with the light off, drinking a glass of ice water. No one worrying about him and no one to worry about and being eighteen in Miami, finished with school, preparing to invade the big league of chess and destroy all the talent around. By ten o'clock he would be sound asleep. He set a tournament record in Detroit that spring with sixteen wins, no draws, no losses. He had arrived.

"Why didn't Berlin play?" I asked.

"He wasn't ready for me. He was afraid."

"Do you really think he's afraid of you?"

"Every waking moment."

Then I asked, "When do you want to come out to Connecticut?"

"Tomorrow."

"There's a noon train," I told him. I studied my train schedule. "The next train is a 2:25."

"I'll be on that one," he said.

He got up and walked around behind my desk and looked at the photograph of my family. It had been taken on a sailboat in the Sound the summer before. Timothy in bathing trunks sat next to his mother in the bow of the boat, looking like a gentle old man. Holding the tiller was Matthew, handsome and dark and sixteen; he bestowed on the camera an expression of suave unconcern. Rebecca swam alongside the boat, kicking up a net of blue spray and laughing. I, of course, snapped the picture. And Jane's smile, on fire with sun and tilted upward like a bright light, her halo of pale hair blowing out wild, her tiny hands moving, blurred now, eternally, in the act of a finger trill accompanying some forgotten speech — this essential vision was built into me like shelter against the chill of night.

"They all have the look," said Julian.

"What look?"

"Why, the look. You see it in magazines. People in

advertisements. People other people want to be like." He picked up the photograph and held it close to his eyes. "Your wife is not a Jew," he said.

"No."

"I will never marry a Jewish girl. All they ever think about is food and sex. And culture. I shouldn't forget culture. The thing to do is keep your kitchen kosher and spend the money on plays and paintings and winters in Florida. Then when you're older you dye your hair lavender. You know the type."

"That's not every Jewish woman."

"No, there's the other type — political, straight black hair, no Jewish Law for them. You see some of them in the chess clubs. They're worse than the other ones." He stared at the photograph again. "The older kid, his hair is dark, but there's no Jewishness in him — I can tell. There isn't much in the little boy — maybe just a little. The girl, though. She looks like you."

"You're talking foolishness," I said.

"Really? Are you an expert or something?"

"A Jew should have better sense than to talk like that," I said.

He looked at me with great wariness. "Who says I'm a Jew?"

"Well, you are a Jew."

"I'm an American," he said.

"Of course, but you can be both. A lot of us are."

"No. You have to be one or the other."

"Julian, you were once quoted — I wasn't going to bring it up — you said your mother made it a condition of marrying your father that he change his name — that he was an English Jew. Is there any truth to it?"

"No comment," he said. He put the picture down and turned toward the window. A flash of lightning flickered on his neck, transforming it for an instant into a vulnerable and pale flower.

"You ought to mind your own business," he said after a silence. "All right, I'm part Jewish. You know that. It's common knowledge. My father is Jewish. But so what? I don't wear a little black hat. I don't know the Jewish holidays. I eat ham all the time. I don't pray. That makes me exactly nothing, and that's the way I want it."

"All right," I said. "I won't argue."

We sat through one of our characteristic silences — Julian staring at his chessboard, while I studied his face. He ran his hands through his hair and I noticed that his nails were long and surprisingly well manicured. I tried to talk to him but he seemed far away, and finally I cleaned up my desk.

Outside, a summer storm had blackened the city, unleashing its fury in dark towers of rain. In the distance I could see the lights of the Queensboro Bridge strung out forlornly in the sky. Thunder cracked and the rain came harder.

I looked at my watch and said, "I have to leave for my train."

"What's the rush?"

"I can just make the 6:02. It takes twenty minutes to get to Grand Central in the rain."

"So get another train."

"The next one is a 7:05."

"Mr. Commuter," he said. "A member of the club. The man with a house in the suburbs. I bet you believe what you read in the New York *Times*."

"I don't like your attitude," I said.

"No one said you had to."

"You've got it in for me. Why, I don't know."

"Do you want me to tell you?" he said. His stare was fixed unwaveringly on my face, and his eyes were inflamed with anger. "You're a patzer," he said bluntly.

Wind and rain dashed against the window and I could hear in the distance thunder exploding on the walls of the midtown buildings. We stood only a few feet apart now, my hands were made into fists, and there was a terrible and utterly fantastic possibility that we would attack each other. But even at that moment — watching him rub a finger quickly across his nose like a rapacious child of the slums and lounging disdainfully, one hand on his hip, but ready for anything — even then, with all the anger I felt, I knew that I could never hit him.

I turned away and walked across the room and sat down heavily on the couch. I let my arms dangle loosely between my legs. "You have no right to call me that," I said.

"You asked me," he said. "I told you."

"But I gave up chess twenty years ago."

"In your life you're a patzer," he said.

I waited for repose to come and then I said carefully, "You know absolutely nothing about my life, Julian. Your life may be full for you. Mine is full in a different way."

He shrugged. "I told you what I think. Anyone who can give up chess for this. This office. This magazine. Living by a train schedule. I can't see it."

"I am a happy man," I explained to him. "My life is full. Most men would give an arm and a leg for the things I have. I would need a week, I would need a month, to name all my blessings. My wife is a beautiful woman in every way. My children are strong and attractive, and they have a deep understanding of the difference between right and wrong. We live in a handsome old house on four of the most beautiful acres on earth. The hills and the trees would take your breath away. I know how to have a good time with my family. I am excited by strong drink, good food and the pleasures of my wife's body. My heart is strong, my appetite is sharp. I am the ruler in my house — I believe that my rule is benevolent. Every morning I feel that I have just been born anew. . . ."

The words poured out, I could not stop them, and then my voice broke with self-pity. I thought I was going to cry.

Julian Prim looked up from his pocket chess set. He looked full into my eyes, and I saw an expression cross his face that was new to me — smiling and faintly sardonic, perhaps you could call it sardonic tenderness. For that single second his coldness no longer seemed inviolable. Lightning passing through the storm lit our faces violet, wavered briefly, vanished, and every question between us leaped forward as though on a stage.

Blood rushed to my face and my hands shook and, afraid that he would see this incriminating evidence of my weakness, I averted my face from him and shouted, "Screw you!"

And of course Parker Evarts, my bureau chief, chose that moment to stop by my office on his way to the elevator.

I did not catch my train. The quarrel had touched a nerve in both of us and I wanted to stay with Julian now. Something had started between us. We ate a sandwich and then took a taxi down to the Gotham Chess Club, and when we walked into the T-shaped room a wave of whispers flowed around us. A big man had arrived. Julian sat down at an empty board and immediately a crowd gathered around him. He set up a difficult end-game position and talked out loud

to himself as he moved. I had never seen this act before. No one sat in the chair across the table from him; it was reserved for another big man. Social manners may be gauche in the world of chess, but protocol is strict and medieval.

Julian moved the white king, holding it limply between thumb and index finger, from queen two back to its original square, and conducted his monologue in a voice suited for lecturing in a vast hall:

". . . Twenty minutes left on my clock, that's all, and I have eight tough moves to get my forty in. Richard Sturdivant is a pawn up on me. So he leans across the table and whispers to me, 'Mate in six.' I look for the mate and sense it isn't there, and then it comes to me, maybe Richard is trying to trick me into losing time. Maybe the mate isn't there. There never was a day he could see a mate I couldn't see."

Julian rested his elbows on the table and stared down at the board. "I almost never have time trouble but I had made a lot of mistakes. Richard was out to get me any way he could. So I say to him, 'Do me a favor, keep your mouth shut. You know the rules. I ought to call a foul on you. . . .'"

"That sounds like Richard," said a voice in the crowd. "Those English professors are tricky. Very, very tricky."

"Hello, Paul," Julian said. "Sit down."

Paul Marcus, a tall man with a suffering face and large, deep eyes like caves, published the only good

chess magazine in the United States. Ten years ago he was one of this country's highly rated masters, but he had retired from tournament play to devote full time to his magazine. He felt a mission to elevate the status of chess in the United States, and was in constant pursuit of angels to back his dreams — his current one being to film for television a play-off match between the two high scorers in this year's Championship Tournament. He lectured, he promoted, he provided starving chess players with phantom assignments for his magazine. He was one of Julian's two friends.

Paul Marcus sat down at the table, and as he spoke the inhaled smoke from his cigarette came out of his mouth slowly, like steaming breath.

"I was going to tell you about Richard and Berlin," he said. "In Kansas City — seven, eight years ago. Before you were born, Julian."

"Before you died, you mean."

"Now, now — a little respect for your elders, sonny boy. Anyway, Berlin was in time trouble. More than ten moves in five minutes and a strangled position. Richard, as you know, tends to be quick — but this time he sat and sat. Then he would start to make a move and sit some more. He knew Eugene was impatient. The longer Richard sat — and he had plenty of time on his clock, an hour — the more impatient Eugene got. You know, jiggle, jiggle. All that fat. So finally he can't stand it. He runs up the aisle to get a

drink of water. One step off the platform and Richard makes his move. Someone yells, 'Hey, Berlin, your move!' So all that Jell-O quivers back to the table. Oy! They go through this performance three or four times. Poor Berlin almost has a breakdown, and P.S., he loses."

"Not me," said Julian through the laughter. "Look at this position. I just got my fortieth move in under two and a half hours. It was a good move because it complicated everything. Then Richard made his sealed move. After the adjournment I murdered him."

"He must have blundered," Paul Marcus said.

"Well, he let the win slip away and then it looked drawish. But I wouldn't take a draw. I had something he didn't see."

Julian quickly played out the game.

"Damn clever," Paul Marcus said. "I remember the game now. It should have won a brilliancy."

"I know it," Julian said. He slowly set up the pieces, moving them delicately, and placing each one in the precise center of its square.

"How about giving me notes on your game with Pollenz last Monday?" Paul Marcus asked. Julian nodded, and Marcus removed from his coat pocket a scoresheet and a pencil. "That king's rook move you made was a shocker. It was a hard continuation to follow. When Pollenz resigned I thought he was actually winning. . . ."

The crowd was still now, and Julian shrugged,

saying, "Pollenz studied that position for an hour. He knew he was beaten in about twenty minutes — his nose turned red. When I beat him his nose always turns red."

"He ought to wear a mask," Paul Marcus said.

"It won't improve his game," said Julian.

"Don't you think Pollenz resigned prematurely?" asked a boy in the crowd, who wore a Riverdale High School T-shirt. He wagged his head from side to side as he talked and the bulb above the table glinted in his glasses. His manner was unattractively know-it-all. "There was an adequate defense for him. Maybe not *perfect*, but adequate. First of all, the king's knight — "

"Shut up," Julian said.

The boy closed his mouth and you could hear his teeth click.

"Pollenz says he anticipated the rook move," Paul Marcus said.

"Never," Julian said. "He always makes himself look good after a game. He never saw it, not until afterwards."

"But I did," said the boy in the Riverdale T-shirt.

Julian looked up at him. "Nobody is asking you, you mamzer. Talk about something you understand. Gin rummy, Parcheesi."

"Don't call me a mamzer."

"But you are a mamzer," Julian said. "In case you can't spell, the word is m-a-m-z-e-r."

"I don't have to take that from you," the boy whined.

"Get lost, Levy," Julian said. "Do us all a favor."

The boy wagged his head around and arranged over his large teeth a calm magisterial smile. Later I talked to him at the drinking fountain and he confided that he had been elected captain of the Riverdale chess team for next fall. "Frankly, we're going to be the best in the city," he announced in a querulous voice. "That Julian, he really burns me. He won't do well in the Championship Tournament, believe me he won't. I'll tell you the truth, he just isn't ready for that level of play. Not nearly ready. I happen to know whereof I speak because I've won my share of games from him — *more* than my share. Frankly, everyone hates his guts." Julian's version was different. "I told you about Levy the other night. We used to let him in pots sometimes — fifty cents a game, ten-second moves, knight odds. But he couldn't win and he bitched so much we kicked him out of the game. Don't let Levy's personality con you. He's a woodpusher, period."

Now Julian was saying to Paul Marcus, "If Pollenz had seen rook to bishop six, sacrificing to the king's pawn, he would have understood my attack. He didn't grab my rook — true — but that was just instinctive caution, or maybe a lucky guess. Still, he made the wrong move. He should have brought his

knight home to protect his king. The queen-side castle finished him."

Julian made these moves quickly on the board, branching out to reveal the dangers awaiting Pollenz if he chose the wrong line. After making a number of notes on his score sheet Paul Marcus said, "Shall we play pots?"

"Don't tempt me," Julian said. "I don't believe in it before a tournament."

"Did you hear how Berlin is training? Turkish baths."

"Nothing can melt that lard," said Julian.

"I wouldn't overdo the training, if I were you. You can get too tight, too fine. Look what happened to Floyd Patterson."

"That bum! Thank you for the comparison. Thanks a lot."

"A little pots will relax you," Paul Marcus said. "Keep you loose. Cohen and Jenkins will come in." They were Senior Masters who had played in previous United States Championship Tournaments; this year neither of them had qualified. Paul Marcus nodded at me. "You, too. We can play with five."

"I would rather not."

"Sure, come on in," said Julian, his eyes wide with bogus innocence. "From me you can have knight-bishop-pawn odds. It's an easy fifty cents."

"I would rather just watch — "

"He'll play," Julian said to Paul Marcus. "Go round up the other pigeons."

"Knight-bishop-pawn odds," Paul Marcus said. "We could all use that, if you're feeling especially generous."

"A pawn to you guys. Don't get funny."

While Paul Marcus was gone I said to Julian, "Why are you dragging me into this? I don't want to play."

"Pots is a good game."

"But I haven't played in years."

"Are you afraid of disgracing yourself?"

"No, that's not it."

"Then play — enjoy it. The point of pots is to enjoy yourself. No one takes it seriously."

Before I could find a way to say no, the three men came up to the table. Abraham Cohen played Julian the first game. He was a surgeon, victimized by a severe facial twitch that drew down the left side of his face like a shade, who had married a woman of great wealth and had at once retired from practice to devote all of his time to chess. Julian explained later that Cohen had played brilliantly until about three years ago, when his game went into a sharp decline.

The players were allowed ten seconds a move, and Paul Marcus, who would play next, acted as referee. By the rules of pots, if a player exceeded the ten-second limit the referee could call "forfeit" and take the place of the offender.

Julian drew the white pieces, and with the point of his index finger gently nudged the king's pawn two squares forward.

"Mate in several, you patzer."

"Jokes," murmured Cohen. "Already he makes with the jokes." He picked up his king's pawn, held it high above the board, then slapped it down on the king three square.

"French Defense," said Julian. "Oh, am I scared. You scare me to pieces, Cohen."

They talked continually, kidding each other and playing to the kibitzers who surrounded the table, and within a minute they had made a number of exchanges and were involved in a middle game that looked slightly favorable for white. Julian had regained the pawn he had given as odds, and he never stopped telling Cohen how scared he was.

"A player of your standing, Cohen, you should come up with your pawn and tickle my knight. Come on, give me a little schmeckle with it. I just sit here trembling."

"Quiet, please. Quiet. I'm thinking."

"We can hear the wheels grinding," Jenkins said.

Cohen's play was slowing down. He studied the board as he lighted a cigarette; his face collapsed in a massive twitch. He moved restlessly in his chair and, rubbing his upper thigh, said, "So — my position is already cramped."

"When he puns," Paul Marcus said, "you know he's finished."

"Move, patzer," Julian said. "One. Two. Three. Come on — move or pay in!"

"So all right. . . ." Reluctantly, Cohen made the forced move with his queen's bishop.

"That's a move?" Julian asked the kibitzers. "Just what has that got to do with the game of chess? Well, I guess we have to take it off." He swooped down on the bishop with his knight.

Cohen recaptured the knight with his king bishop's pawn, thus giving him doubled pawns and an exposed king.

"Well, now, what can I do?" said Julian. "I am so scared I don't know what I can do. Petrified. How can I make the great Cohen eat his heart out?"

The kibitzers watched every move that Julian made, they drank in every word, they thrilled over the raillery these professionals used on one another, and one of their great joys was to be asked to join a game of pots.

Julian said, "Let's give that king a little schmeckle now. In fact, let's give him a great big schmeck. . . ." Julian checked with his queen.

Abraham Cohen scowled at the board, and said, "Oy gevalt, oy gevalt," over and over.

"Move. One, two, three — *move*," Julian said. "Move, patzer."

Cohen banged the king down into its rook's square and shook his head sadly. He started to groan. His groans lengthened and deepened with each compromised move. He tried to build walls against attack, but his position was devastated on every front; every move Julian made brought forth fresh horrors, a new rash of imprecations and a more untenable game for black.

"A tickle on the king," said Julian.

Cohen moved.

"I could give you a modest schmeckle with the knight. I think I will."

Cohen twitched, and drummed his fingers on the table.

"One, two, three and *move.*"

With a sigh, Cohen moved.

"Well, well, well," said Julian. "I have this bishop right here. What is it about this bishop? What is it that makes it different from all other bishops?" Julian grinned as he checked Cohen with the bishop, winning one of his rooks.

"So I resign," said Cohen. "Under duress."

"Feed the pot," Julian said to him.

"My heart is broken," Cohen said. Then he burst out laughing, and Paul Marcus sat down opposite Julian, setting up the white pieces.

After a struggle for control of the center, Paul Marcus moved too quickly and left his queen's bishop *en*

prise. "Third-class goy chess," he said. "I will hate myself forever." He resigned soon after losing the bishop.

Next Jenkins. He played for the equal exchanges, maintaining his pawn advantage into what looked like a won end game, but Julian, with some delicate maneuvering, nursed a passed pawn through to promotion and victory.

"And you never study the end game," Jenkins said.

"Why should I? The end game is logic, it's checkers. Anybody can do it."

Jenkins turned to me and said, "A dollar fifty for you in the pot. Good luck."

"He can use it," Julian said. "Say a prayer for him too."

At the risk of sounding overdramatic, I have to say that I felt a sense of shame as I sat down at the board. After twenty years I had come to see myself as an essentially humble man, put on this earth to perform useful tasks and to rear my children in goodness and compassion. Chess, even this form of it, would always be the enemy of my modest demands on life; to pursue victory meant an acceptance of its value; by craving victory (as I once had and certainly would again) I made it the important measure of life. And as I looked at Julian hunched forward in his chair he became the enemy, and I knew then, with a dull sinking of spirits, that I would fight — that with every last ounce of strength and will I would fight, no mat-

ter how unimportant the game or hopeless the cause.

I replaced Julian's bishop and knight in their positions. "The pawn is enough odds," I said. "There might as well be some glory in losing."

Julian looked at me blankly and then broke into a short shout of laughter. "Glory in losing," he said. "That's an interesting idea."

I opened with the Ruy Lopez, and the game moved quick and straight into the center where we struggled for control of the crucial squares. Our first twelve moves were standard in the opening and our development and possibilities remained about equal. I sensed that Julian was playing a placid game. There was no enigmatic thrust that signaled the start of an ingenious and brutal attack. I told myself, this move, this one, will be it, this will be the start of it. I must not lose my head when it comes.

But instead, he seemed to be using his development for defense, for subtle probing and the slow exploitation of positional weakness. All through these first moves I was trying to clear my head of misgivings and fear. Emotion loses games, the cold mind wins them. I laughed at Julian's comments and those of the others, and I made some myself, and pretended that the game did not matter. It was only pots. But to me it was more than pots and I did want to win. Perhaps (it occurred to me) I needed to impress my existence on Julian Prim.

Soon — from the fourteenth move, or maybe the

fifteenth — he won the fight for the center and occupied more and more of the space on my king side. Still, he moved in slowly, cautiously, guiding the pieces here and there with a contemptuous limpness of his wrist.

"Let's try a little pawn push now," he said. "A modest little pawn push."

On the twentieth move we exchanged queens, he won the odds pawn and held the better attacking position. I studied the board, trying to see deeply enough into the possibilities to stave off defeat for a while. Suddenly I realized that I had taken too long — much longer than ten seconds, more like thirty — and I quickly made the move which seemed like the least of many evils.

I looked up and said, "Sorry I took so long."

My eyes met Julian's, and though he immediately looked away I sensed between us a kind of freemasonry of mutual respect.

A few moves later my game was obviously lost. I lighted a cigarette and rose from the chair. "My head aches." I said. "You have to build up to this sort of effort."

"You did okay," Paul Marcus said, and I felt a flush of pleasure.

Julian still studied the board, his cheek crushed into his bent left wrist, his mouth slightly parted, his eyes squinting with concentration — his pose was so

characteristic that I was sorry I could not photograph him for *Outlook* at that instant.

He set up the pieces in a previous position and, instead of moving my queen knight's pawn to five as I had done, he nudged my queen rook to knight one. He said, "That move would have drawn."

I stared, and tried to conceive of a continuation that would lead to a draw, but my tired mind would not revolve around the problem.

"Don't you see it?"

"No."

"A couple of text moves. See? Then you have a perpetual check."

There was a slight hush in the room and, looking up, I saw a huge man in a flowing yellow slicker coming through the door. As though to announce his presence, there was a dim flow of thunder and the lights in the room flickered low for a moment. He stopped inside the door to talk to someone, and he gestured and grimaced a good deal as he talked, moving his fat fingers in front of his face, and rain water showered down around him, forming a dark circle at his feet.

"Berlin," Paul Marcus said.

"He hasn't taken off a pound," said Jenkins.

I watched him peel off his coat, throw it on a chair and move toward our table with a kind of flowing grandeur. He was talking all the time.

"How are the Turkish baths?" Paul Marcus said.

"Steam," he said. "I take steam. I sit in a box and sweat."

He inspected a chair thoroughly, slowly lowered himself onto it and grunted his relief. He stared across the table at Julian, who continued to stare at the board.

"An hour at a time I sit in there," he went on. "I sweat and sweat. Nothing happens. I just grow weak."

"You have to stick at it," Cohen said.

Eugene Berlin sat and thought deeply about that. Then he said, "You sawbones are crooks. I wouldn't trust any of you to carve a cut of beef. To listen to your advice is to laugh. . . . How are you, Prim?"

Julian did not answer.

"Got a problem there you need help with?" Eugene Berlin spoke to Julian in a sort of imitation jovial manner.

"I'm in a problem." Julian made a number of moves. "I think I can handle it myself."

"Congratulations," Eugene Berlin said.

Julian looked at him. "What did you say that for?"

"I don't know. It just seemed the right thing to say. Do you mind being congratulated?"

"All you do is open your mouth," Julian said, "and the words come out."

"Pleasanter words than yours," said Berlin. He turned to Paul Marcus and they talked about a recent tournament in Buffalo. ". . . And I poked the bishop

down his king's throat. There's new analysis from that game. You should do an opening-game study on it."

"I will," Paul Marcus said.

As they continued to talk Julian's face got red. Suddenly, he struck out, snake-fast, and swept the pieces off the board.

"How can you concentrate!" he said.

Berlin's eyes rolled upward and his smile vanished. "Don't act like a fool," he said.

"Don't call me a fool."

"You're a little fool. A childish little fool."

Julian's eyes cut through him coldly. "If I'm a fool and I lick you next month, what does that make you?"

"You are a rude little boy," said Berlin, the color in his face rising. "You are also a boor. Do you know what a boor is, boy? With your limited vocabulary I should explain it to you maybe. A boor is an ill-bred lout. Do you follow me, boy? Do I make myself clear?"

"All right, both of you," Paul Marcus said.

"This is between the boy and me. This boy, this *boorish* boy, needs a lesson. He will learn from his superior in skill. Total humiliation!"

Julian smiled. "We will see who does the teaching," he said. "Can a deer learn how to run from a pig?"

Eugene Berlin was on his feet.

"Why you little bastard!" he said. "I will make you sorry you ever lived!"

"And a greyhound from a toad?" said Julian.

"I will destroy you!"

"Don't tell me you have a new opening variation," Julian said in an insolent drawl. "That scares me. You can't imagine how that scares me. You know what we should call you? Tel Aviv Fats. The fat monarch of chess. . . ."

Smiling, Julian pushed himself up from his chair and walked slowly, thumbs hooked in his trousers, out into the rain and the night.

✠ ✠ 4 ✠ ✠

My wife Jane is a woman swift upon the errands of kindliness. Her response to need has the purity of an act of creation, and so it should not have surprised me that from the moment Julian Prim entered our home her drifting summer routine was charged with purpose. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that a man's home is a kingdom to be worn like a crown, and my wife's eagerness to serve Julian — to fix his favorite meals, to arrange our schedule around his habits — stirred gloomy forebodings in me. It became clear that my life would not be quite the same center of her concern now that the famous young master had crashed our lives. I was like a man standing dazed among his possessions, no longer sure in the face of another man's astounding presence that anything is bought and paid for.

Even so, it would be good, I thought, to have him

in the house, for there would be more time with him — time to take long walks and let the country silence work on him, time to pry open windows that stuck at the sill of his reserve — dark shuttered windows. Curiously, though, after his first few days in Connecticut he was gone from the house more and more — and finally constantly. I grew angry at his absences and discussed them with my wife. I had already built up a resentment against him for his cavalier treatment of her. Beyond a sullen grunt of thanks for services rendered he seemed unwilling to recognize her presence on earth.

"But he's not all wrapped up in our life, our kindnesses, Rafe — you can't expect him to be. Chess is everything."

"He could say thank you. He could offer to dry a dish."

"That's not his gift," she said.

"Where does he go every day?"

"I'm not sure. He says to the beach."

"Don't you believe him?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't — not entirely. I've had a feeling, maybe more an intuition than a feeling. Anyway, I've been doing a little detective work —"

"What have you found out?"

"Nothing, really — only that he hasn't been to the beach for nearly two weeks. He takes his bathing suit with him every day, but when he comes back it's dry."

"He's not swimming, that's all. He sits there."

"No. His clothes would be sandy. He used to bring half the beach back to his room. I don't think he goes there any more."

"That doesn't make sense."

"Yes it does, Rafe — it's beginning to."

"What do you mean?"

"Yesterday — well, I just had a feeling, so I called the University. The downstairs curtains are ready at Hill's and I thought Becky could bring them home with her. It turns out that she hasn't been there all week — not once. And last week she missed three days."

I started to speak but just stared at my wife with my mouth open.

"I sort of suspected she wouldn't be there. That's why I called, I guess. . . . I think she and Julian are together."

"What are you talking about?"

"There's no reason to look shocked. They're both young and attrac —"

"I don't believe it. I just don't believe it." But even as I spoke the words I remembered the way Rebecca had looked at him for an instant during dinner soon after he arrived. I could recall the expression now; her bright and watching eyes a powerful manifesto that she was suddenly, and perhaps for the first time, in the company of a stranger who could matter very much. And finally I said, "All right, maybe they have

seen each other, Jane. But if you're right, something has to be done. In the first place, Becky is older than he is. In December, she'll be twenty-one. She's a junior in college, and Julian Prim is an emotionally retarded chess player. It just isn't possible!"

"Anything is possible, Rafe. We were possible."

"Yes," I said, "but that was different."

She took my hand and held it to her face. She leaned toward me and kissed me on the mouth, and for some reason a scene I had long forgotten came into my mind and warmed me along with her kiss. It was a morning at Cape Cod, ten or eleven years ago, and the sea was light and striated with rainbows. Rebecca and Jane were swimming and I saw their uncovered heads, black and gold, in the bright water. Then they came out, Rebecca riding on my wife's shoulders, and I saw they were laughing, and when they came closer I saw that their bathing suit straps had slipped down their arms. That was all.

I returned Jane's kiss violently and her eyes opened wide. My mind paused briefly on the illimitability of her perfections — then I was back with my daughter, who most of the time seemed to stumble short of my dreams.

"She can't go back to college," I said, "if she doesn't make up those credits. And to cut classes for Julian of all people! I'd better have a talk with her."

"Rafe — please don't be upset. I already have had

a talk with her. About her future at Swarthmore, about Julian — about a number of things. . . ."

"But — hell! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, you were in the city late last night and I didn't get a chance. The classes — she admitted cutting them, but she denied seeing much of Julian. Once or twice to the beach. Nothing else. Most of the time she just rides around, going to movies, seeing friends, sitting in fields and reading. Trying to sort things out, she said — exactly what things she couldn't explain."

"You don't believe her about Julian."

"No," Jane said. "For once in her life I'm sure she's lying to me. Everything seemed too casual — too rehearsed."

What I could not say even to Jane was that my daughter had always come to me in the past — if she came to me broken I could put her back together again; if joy consumed her, giving a lovely little tremble to her face, I was there to share it. Always before it had been that way, and now that my influence had waned I sensed that she had been slipping away from me lately at a faster and faster speed.

I said, "We can send Julian back to New York."

Jane twisted a strand of hair around her finger as she stared at me. "Be careful, Rafe. We have to really think this out. If Becky's lying — which I admit is

most unlike her — and if she *is* spending her time with Julian, then my guess is it's serious."

"Maybe, maybe not."

"There's a fever in her right now," Jane said. "She glitters. All that coolness she loves so much is gone."

"I haven't noticed."

"I saw her one morning waltzing on the lawn. She whirled around and around by herself, stretching her arms out, and she looked so lovely."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know."

"Sometimes you don't tell me things."

"I guess that's true," Jane said. "We never seem to have the time."

"I can't imagine Becky waltzing on the lawn."

"You don't know this Becky," Jane said. "And anyway, you've been very taken up with Julian."

"That's my job," I said.

"Of course."

I said quickly, "Isn't there anything we can do?"

"We can force her to go to school."

"I mean about Julian. I just don't want her mixed up with him." I waited for Jane to say something, to agree, and when she didn't I stammered out, "I just *don't*, that's all."

Suddenly Jane smiled, her eyes flashing merrily. "Why?" she asked.

I hesitated and then said, "He's a chess player."

"I married one."

"No — I gave it up for us."

"There never was a choice between us and chess," Jane said. "You gave it up for you."

"You're right."

"Don't ever try to put it off on me, Rafe. You can quit your job tomorrow and play chess and I'll follow along. You know that."

"I know that," I said.

She looked into my eyes. "Do you really know it?"

"I really know it," I lied.

I put my arms around her and drew her down into my lap. The living room was dark and I turned on a solitary lamp beside the couch. We sat for a moment holding each other, we breathed in the same rhythm and I felt her soft body move deeply into my curves. There was so much that could be said now that we were struck dumb.

I finally said, "I still think Julian should go back to New York."

"Whatever you think best."

"But you don't agree."

"I already told you. If it were up to me, I'd do nothing."

"Nothing," I repeated.

"You're the logician in this family. If Becky cares about him and we interfere — what then? How is she going to feel about us?"

"In the end she might be grateful."

"But, Rafe, she's her own girl now. She wants to

make her own mistakes. It's different with Matthew. We have to share all his dramas, and in a way that's worse. God knows when he'll break away — and how. But Becky, she only wants to be left alone now."

"All right," I said. "But if Julian stays, I'm going to see that he spends more time with me. The profile needs a lot of work."

"Wonderful," Jane said, rising and moving toward the kitchen. "The thing about you is, you're wise. You're wiser than anyone I know."

I sat on the couch and stared after her, and I knew that she was the wise one. She had decided on our course of action, and at the same time had forestalled (perhaps forever) the need to see the truth about her husband — the penitential image of a man at a desk spinning out his days and years, because once long ago he had demanded that a pretty face beguile him into burning up his power — that was the truth I had learned after so many years. And learned from Julian Prim.

A curious thing happened the following day. Julian came to my study dressed in a sweat shirt and white shorts and holding Rebecca's tennis racket. We stood talking for a moment, and I had the strong impression that he had not slept the night before. His face was pale and drawn, and nerves jumped in his eyes. He usually chose his words with care, but now he was nervous and talked on, and I did not try to help him.

"How can you work with all this disorder?" He nodded at the books on the floor and at my desk which was strewn with papers.

"It doesn't bother me."

"It would drive me crazy. And there isn't any air in here."

"That doesn't bother me either."

"You should get some fresh air. Fresh air is good for you."

"I probably should," I said.

"Tennis is a good game. Do you like tennis?"

"Yes."

"Well, why don't you play me?"

"Today?"

"Yes."

"All right," I said. "But later. Late this afternoon. I have to drive into town."

"Okay. I'll be waiting." He started to leave the room.

"Julian," I said.

Slowly he turned around.

"I didn't know you played tennis." I had intended to ask him about his days with Rebecca, what they had been doing and what they had been saying and thinking, and about the nights — I had intended to ask him about the nights, too, when they were alone in the house and we were out, or else we were in our bed, sleeping our innocent sleep, and they were awake and perhaps in one of their bedrooms together.

Although the words would not come out, the bewilderment and anger were in the tone of my voice, irreducible; Julian was taken by surprise. His mouth opened a little as he looked at me.

"Maybe you learned out here," I suggested.

"No," he said, smiling faintly. "When I was a kid in Brooklyn we lived near some public courts and I played some. I was on my high-school team one year."

He executed a swift forehand stroke for emphasis, and when he brought the racket to his side, the press which was loose slipped off and clattered loudly on the floor. He picked it up and when he looked at me his face was filled with blood. "I watched you play last weekend. You can take care of me, don't worry."

"I play to have fun," I said, "and relax."

After he left I brooded on this new development and drank a beer — my second of the morning; I was drinking more than usual. I tried to puzzle out his reason for wanting to play tennis with me. There had to be a reason because Julian did nothing for its own sake.

When I returned from the city late that afternoon I worked until six, drank a martini and then walked with Julian through the still afternoon to the court in front of the pond at the end of our property. Rebecca joined us there. The sky at that hour was vast, blue as high as the eye could see. The trees were still, the pond as flat as glass and the sun burned incarnadine in the southern sky. It was the kind of summer day

that could instill in me the feeling that I stood on the firm terrain of love and health and that within my mortality something, some shred of me, would live on forever. It was the kind of day that exhilarated me and then, inevitably, brought sadness, for it reminded me that my flesh would perish and that I would never see again this sweet scene with the tall trees, the blue pond, violet-turning, black-turning with the onrush of night, and the gentle hills beyond.

Julian and I began batting the ball back and forth, and it was obvious that he had no style, no true sense of the game. My tennis was like that of most men my age who give a few idle hours to it three or four times a summer. I had received splendid instruction from Jane — a fine player — and I addressed the ball in the prescribed way, but there was rarely a true meeting of racket and ball.

An awful desire grew in me as we rallied — the desire to beat Julian, to beat him so badly that he would need all of his pride to assuage his loss. Beat him for me. Beat him for Rebecca, who sat barricaded behind sun glasses watching us. My game was defensive in style; I would rely on my backhand strokes as much as possible for placements, and if my opponent came too close to the net I would try to lob over his head; but now I was smashing the ball and most of my drives went into the net. For all of Julian's awkwardness, he was quick on his feet and managed to dunk most of my shots back to me, not with any

force or plan, but they did come back, and perhaps after all he would not be so easy as I had thought.

I grew more tense as I realized that Julian had much the stronger forehand. I lobbed a few easy balls to him and he slammed them all over the court, wildly but with power, and I made very little effort to return them. He played the net and I hit some hard shots at him, good twisting slices that he could not handle and then I played the net for a while, finally getting fairly loose, and then we practiced serves on each other and he also had the stronger serve, with a wicked natural top spin.

We warmed up for twenty minutes and then rallied for serve (he won). Before starting the set we sat down and wiped our hands and arms on a towel, and I noticed that Julian did not sweat very much. The martini was working on me — I could feel it stinging in my throat. I kept blotting the perspiration off my face and I resented his lack of sweat, and I resented being out on the court with him when I could be inside my house having another drink and discussing the day with my wife.

"You work hard out there," he said.

"Harder than I should. I need practice."

"Not for me, you don't."

"You're very polite," I said. "I'm playing rotten tennis and you know it."

He shrugged. "What can I know? This isn't my game."

"Daddy, don't downgrade yourself," Rebecca said. "You'll be accused of false modesty."

"By whom?"

"Why, by me, of course," she said, smiling sweetly.

"Let's play the set," I said to Julian, I'm afraid a little grimly. "It will be dark in another hour."

"Which side of the court do you want?" he asked.

"I don't care."

"The sun is in your eyes on the east side."

"Then you take the west side. You won the volley."

"That was only for serve," he said. "We'll flip a coin for sides."

"It doesn't matter to me. I really don't give a damn."

"Well, I do," he said. "Heads or tails?" He had fished a dime out of his shorts.

"You're both so childish," Rebecca said.

"All right. Heads."

He won the toss and, after hesitating, moved over to the west side of the court. "I'll tell you what. We can change sides every game."

"No," I said. "You won for the whole set."

"I don't want an unfair advantage."

"That's too bad. You won and now you've got it."

"Ho hum," Rebecca said.

"Now keep out of this," I told her.

"The winner can have his choice," Julian said. "Right?"

"Of course."

"Then I choose to start on the west side," he said. "And alternate."

I walked up to the net and clutched it and as I talked I shook it back and forth.

"Okay," I said. "You're the guest, Julian. You can do whatever you want. You understand that, don't you? Let's not fuss about it. Let's play. We want to get this set over with before dark."

"You two are just alike," Rebecca said.

"I can't see what you're so excited about," he told me, ignoring her, and then he moved to the back line and assumed his crouched position for the serve. He double faulted three times the first game and I won easily. Then, from an excess of cautiousness, I lobbed my first serve of the second game over the net with nothing on it. Realizing my mistake, I rushed back to play the drive I knew would be coming, but with an easy flick of his wrist he touched a soft shot just over the net, and the ball bounced indolently, then bounced again before my racket reached it.

The entire set went that way. I made one frustrating mistake after another — I felt myself growing more rigid and uncertain with each game. I lost the set 6-3, I was aced by his serves continually and dropped three love games. It was the worst beating I had taken since I first began playing, and I felt very bitter, hot and tired. I craved a cool drink; I craved the style to walk off the court with some last vestige of my pride; but most of all I craved another chance

to beat him. And yes: to show Rebecca that I could beat him.

Julian looked at the sky. "There's still enough light. Do you feel like another set?"

"Yes."

Rebecca smiled at us over the paperback novel she'd been reading through most of the set. "You'll both drop dead of a heart attack." She stood, stretched her arms and yawned. "Competitive sports are a bore, aren't they? And they do such bad things to people."

"If you're so bored," I said, "why don't you go back to the house?"

"Yeah," Julian said. "Don't do us any favors."

"Marvelous idea, Daddy. It's time for my gin and tonic anyway." And over her shoulder, as she walked away, she added, "Be a good loser now. And, Julian — you be a good winner."

A subtle shift of air was turning the soft twilight cool, and as I rolled the balls around on my racket, getting ready to serve, I told myself that I would do better this time and that I would not react badly if I took another beating. The only victory in losing would be that he did not know I cared; he must not know how much I cared.

Before serving I reviewed what I had learned about his game. His backhand was weak and I must play to it more. His forehand was fast and seemed to explode off the clay court into my face. He held his racket like

a club and his form was clumsy, but his speed carried him to most of my best shots, and he would never give up on anything. He had grown stronger and more sure of himself as the first set had progressed, and I tried to remember (standing there, running my fingers along the strings) how I had won my points and the ones he had thrown away. He was good on lobs and lobs were my strong suit. It was hard to get him on the run or seriously out of position because his reactions were quick and he had a fine sense of where I would place my shots. Too many of my returns in the first set had been in high, spinning arcs, and more often than not he slashed them back at me wickedly. I knew that to have any chance I had to keep the ball down, move it around in better patterns, and give up the lobs.

But after Julian returned my first serve deep in the court, and we both rushed the net, leaning into it, and he stroked a level forehand by me that sent up a puff of chalk on the base line, I could not shake away the feeling that I had made a disastrous blunder; that I should have quit after the first set; that I was not feeling well, and even a win, formed in the mean acids of this contest, would be a loss.

He broke through my service and I was ready to concede the set. I was still too timid to blast out with my first serve, and save the accuracy for my second. Julian won the next game, acing me three times. I sat

on the grass beside the court and dried my head with a towel.

"You want to quit?" Julian said.

"No."

"It's beginning to get dark."

"I think we can get the rest of this set in."

"Okay. It doesn't matter to me either way."

"Then let's play."

"It's more fun without women around watching," he said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, they bring themselves into it. If we're alone it's just between us two. I like it better that way."

"Rebecca wasn't paying close attention to us."

Julian smiled and clapped his hand to his cheek. "Ah — come on, you know better than that. Her eyes were staring right through that book. She watched every move — everything. Women watch everything."

I walked lamely onto the court. Julian waited for my serve in a very shallow position now (he no longer respected it) and until the last second he held his racket behind his back, arching his chest and back muscles. I wound up and hit the ball hard and it was way long. I hit my second shot equally hard. It went into the net. I double faulted again, but then settled down and took ten minutes to lose that game. After that, Julian's shots became wild and I broke through

his service twice in a row. We were playing even tennis now, some of our volleys going on as long as an entire earlier game. When the score stood at 5-4 my favor I took a moment to wipe my face and neck, and I told myself that I was going to win.

But Julian won the next game and then he broke through my serve, and suddenly I was down six games to five, and it was his serve again. The court was almost dark now and the crickets were loud in the grass. Mosquitoes were biting my arms and legs. Julian performed his double windup, pumping his body above the waist, and then uncoiled as though a pin inside him had been released; the ball curved down just inside the line, with vicious, twisting motion that he managed to get on his best serves, and I took a chance and lobbed — for the first time that set — deep to his forehand. He stalked the ball, judging it well; he chopped down on it brutally while it was still in the air. It grazed the top of the net and shot up high, spinning fast, on my side of the net, and I watched it plummet down, down, and finally at the last possible second I ran up to it and leaned on the return smash with every ounce of strength I had. For the first time since early in the first set Julian did not get his racket on the ball. I broke through his service.

We played good tennis for the next few minutes, the best we had played. With the games tied at 7-7

it was too dark and we had to quit. I sprawled out on the grass, listening to the blood pump in my ears; with every beat of my heart a light flashed in front of my eyes.

Julian sat beside me slapping at mosquitoes.

"Do you want to finish the set tomorrow?" I asked.

He waited a moment before answering and then said, "No."

"Why not?" I propped myself on an elbow and stared at him.

He stretched out on his stomach, spreading his arms and legs wide in the cool grass.

"I don't know," he said. "Tennis is a ridiculous game. It means nothing. Just back and forth, back and forth. . . ." He paused. I sat and waited, and I wondered about him and Rebecca and knew that I could never say anything. Then he added, "We killed each other enough today. I don't know why you wanted to kill me — but I guess you've got your own reasons. As far as I'm concerned — well, these things are never personal with me. I want to kill everyone."

Later that week Julian came to my study, clutching his packed bag, and asked me to drive him to the railroad station. He explained that he wanted to spend some time in his apartment with his chess books before the tournament started; he planned to study the latest opening analyses, and in particular

Berlin's favorite variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, which Paul Marcus had examined in the most recent issue of his magazine.

My spirits soaring, I offered to drive him into the city. He shrugged and said that he did not care; he just wanted to leave as soon as possible. My generous impulse came easily, because after our tennis game three days before he had suddenly been around the house again. Rebecca was spending a few days with a friend in Stamford, near the University; apparently all was over between them.

Julian seemed anxious to talk, and he even discussed the strategy he planned to use against Berlin. In his words: "If you can exploit it, Berlin's strength becomes a weakness. He puts his stock in pressing a small positional advantage, and he usually kills any player with a wide-open style. Still, I am convinced it takes a wide-open style to beat him. Tahl did well against him in Cuba. The thing I have to do is attack early and find a way to keep it sound, because I noticed something about Berlin when he played the Russians last time — Tahl especially: if he got driven too far on the defensive, or the position got too complicated, he would counterattack, and it usually did not pay off for him. The problem is to make him overplay his hand, make him gamble. Berlin is the type who hates to gamble.

"I have an opening I've been saving just for him. No one will expect it from me. It should come as a

big surprise. Actually, I've been studying it for a long, long time. In secret. . . . I won't tell you what it is — but believe me, it really ought to throw the fat man off his stride."

I had filled a notebook in the last two days. Now I didn't need him any more and, although it seemed like a kind of defeat to admit it, I was relieved to see him go.

We drove into Manhattan without exchanging a word. A little rain fell as the Volkswagen dipped through the green summer velvet of Westchester — a gentle and excursive rain, not wild like the storms on the Sound. Lights already burned in some of the houses, and stamped on the mist was the wooden lace of a fence gate lying disused beside the road. It made a forlorn monument to the days before an electric fence rose up around the new manufacturing plant.

Julian looked worn, as though the Connecticut fresh air had annihilated his city nerves. There was blue shadow under his eyes and he kept hacking out a nervous cough. I noticed that his hand trembled when he held a Kleenex to his mouth, and he passed visibly into a state of panic as we drove along the Henry Hudson with Manhattan rising up ahead.

I drove him directly to the Gotham Chess Club on Eleventh Street, and we sat for a moment with the motor running, either trying to find something to say, or else searching for a way to say nothing.

Julian wrenched a smile onto his face with perceptible effort.

"In two weeks," he said, "you will be talking to a champion."

"I hope so very much," I told him.

"Master Prim," he said. "The United States Chess Champion."

He got out of the car and, as he looked in at me, his fingers held the door in a tight embrace.

"Well, thanks for everything. And thank Mrs. Rafael."

"I will."

"Hospitality is a very great thing," he said gravely. "Country hospitality. That's the best kind. It's real."

"Thank you."

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Julian."

As I pulled away, west, to the highway, he stood at the door of the Gotham and waved his hand once in a stiff gesture of farewell.

Large events hang on the most inconsequential vagaries of fate. That is a truism which has never struck me as apt. And yet this book would never have been written if my daughter had not caught a severe cold the weekend before the tournament began.

August had arrived, and the weather was very hot. I followed a tradition dating from her childhood,

when she'd had scarlet fever, and read aloud to her from a book of poetry. I had not been in Rebecca's bedroom for more than a year; the books and the pictures on the walls had changed: the room had grown up with her. Chinese lyric poems could not hold my attention, and all I could think about was the polar air in New York restaurants, and what a parsimonious fool I was not to have installed air conditioning.

At the head of a thousand roaring warriors,
With the sound of gongs,
My husband has departed
Following glory.

At first I was overjoyed
To have a young girl's liberty.

Now I look at the yellowing willow-leaves;
They were green the day he left.

I wonder if he also was glad?

Soon she fell into a doze. I started out of the room, when a blue leather-bound volume on her dressing table caught my eye. I picked it up and quickly skimmed a number of the entries — Timothy had given her the diary last Christmas — and I knew suddenly, with a cold tightening of my skin, that I would read it all. I could not help myself. I sensed

that my life was bound up in the words I would read, and I was strangely confident that I could defend my action if I were caught.

I bided my time with a patience that might be mistaken for character, but which in me is nothing more than simple caution. Soon Rebecca felt better. Three weeks went by. During that period I was absorbed in the tournament then in progress, and Rebecca, I understood from my wife, was applying herself to the make-up courses with unaccustomed vigor. Then when school closed at the end of August, and I was writing up the dramatic game between Julian and Eugene Berlin that decided the tournament, rushing to beat my deadline, she accepted an invitation to visit a college friend in Philadelphia.

I had gambled that diaries are left behind on ten-day visits — and, just as I had hoped, hers stayed in an unlocked drawer. Therefore I, Francis Rafael, a struggling-to-be-good, -to-be-honorable man, became a thief of his daughter's emotions. A terrible trespasser. And yet I was untroubled by moral qualms; I was surprised at my indifference. Julian Prim was the subject, the heart, of the diary, and so I had to read it, I had to know. I could not stop myself.

The morning she left I raced through the entries — those cryptic bursts of a heart that had needed little shelter from pain. She wrote a bright undergraduate prose, full of funny strings of words, half sentences; but there was nothing I could forget: everything that

she said clung to my mind, not one feeling or thought passed away — I felt every clear shaft of joy and sorrow with her, every pang, every hope, the inevitable slow shadows that engulfed her gentleness and purity engulfed me, too. . . . I became my daughter, a fragment of her heart.

As I read the diary through (the entries in her cramped hand, some brief, the majority long and full of dialogue, involved three weeks in July and covered all the diary's pages), I felt under a strange spell. My often inappropriate young daughter suddenly made sense. She stood before me — a separate voice, a separate mind. I read the diary again and again, almost in a dream. And that evening I sat at my typewriter — wanting to know and to understand, to create the understanding, to light up the shadows surrounding her and Julian Prim — and made her words into mine.

✠ ✠ 5 ✠ ✠

He stood there in his gangster suit. It gleamed in the sun as he waited on the station platform, and he carried a small canvas bag — yellow — with one of the handle straps torn and hanging down. His shoes were pointed and had tassels, and his white tie was like a lick of flame on his black shirt. She had seen those clothes in *Guys and Dolls* and in those old Warner Brothers movies on TV, starring Bogart and Cagney and Raft.

There he stood, a strange-looking boy, not even dressed to her taste, and yet the second she saw him she was struck by a wild thought — he was the one to whom she would give the major kiss of her life. . . .

The sun as it beamed on his face brought out all the character in the bones. His face seemed in opposition to everything. As Rebecca drove up he was staring out over the end of the tracks toward the tiny

village which services the rich of our countryside, and his expression looked blind to all activity outside his mind. There was a dramatic difference between his face in profile and full, she noticed that immediately. In profile you followed the delicate chin and small nose and you would have said it was a sensitive face. Poetic. But seen straight on you received the shocking impact of its brutality.

Julian lifted his arm when she shouted to him, a flutter of slender muscles running under the flesh of his forearm. She stayed in the car while he walked over, and he hitched up his pants and moved stiffly toward her like someone concealing physical pain.

"Father couldn't come. I'm Becky. . . ."

His blue eyes pointed at her, plunged into her, biting and tearing, and all she could feel was a hot glitter under the ribs.

The ride home was harrowing for her. They passed over the wooden bridge at Fowler's Falls with the water streaming silver in the sun and descending darkly into tree shadows that moved at soft random in the wind. Rebecca had always considered Fowler's Falls one of the more beautiful views in the state, and she thought he would respond to it, but he simply raised his eyes and glanced around coolly, then returned to an inspection of his fingernails. He has an infantile attachment to his nails, she thought, and further conversation choked inside of her.

From the moment Julian really refused to look at

our house she knew that he was obdurate to beauty — and she hoped that he would never see one of our green evenings after a violent rain has swept the willows and elms into shimmering motion, then left them still, as though set in glass, under a dripping sky. It was the green that she loved, there was so much black in it, and she wondered how he could be so crass. She felt frustrated and excited and angry, all at once. And as they got out of her Karmann Ghia she still thought about that kiss she had to give — *the* kiss. The major one of her life.

She could not get away from the knowledge that Julian had stunned her the second she laid eyes on him — stunned her dizzy, like the dream she used to have where the angel would unfold white above her head and pour warm, ethereal smiles down on her. Perhaps Julian was her angel, sent to flood her eyes with brilliant light and joy everlasting. All she knew was that he had stunned her, that she was aware of him in a way that made her skin tingle. The awareness was so intense that she was sure it must be advertised in her eyes like billboards.

There was also the element of surprise. When she learned that a chess player was coming out to the house she had not expected very much. Something with pimples and weak eyes. Something vaguely unpleasant like those draggy boys at Swarthmore, William Hampton and Johnny Schwed. Ugh and double ugh. Something that would never thrill you at all.

And then there he was on the station platform. . . .

Summer school that first afternoon was a thorough loss. One daydream followed another in which she thought of devastatingly witty and dazzlingly perceptive things to say to him. When she got home she was thrown into a fit of despond to learn from her mother that he was eating dinner in his room. She thought of her mother as a woman for whom life is a matter of ceaseless motion, all leading like a straight arrow to the good thing, the right, the real thing — a woman who will somehow pummel meaning into life with the same direct energy she applies to plumping the pillows each morning. Rebecca loved her mother, but now she was angered completely out of countenance because Julian Prim was being sheltered in his room.

She sat brooding in the living room, sipping a beer and squinting at the pink sun pinned between the curtains, about to slip below the sill and set. Then munch, munch, mumble, mumble (where do parents think up all those questions?), and back to the couch with *Ulysses,* eyes racing through Molly Bloom's monologue and mind wondering if there was even a trace of that rich juice in her. Certainly her body was good, her face was a shade too round but not bad, and the blue of her eyes had a drop of magical violet. So where is my slick Lothario? she thought. When will he come and put my virtue to the test?

She went upstairs to her room at eleven, and knelt

beside her bed to say her mother's Protestant prayers. Faith for her had come to be more nagging superstition than piety — beginning in her last year of high school, when she would rub doorknobs to ward off evil spirits; or rather the one evil monster who lurked in the dark at the turn in the stairs, strings of whisker hanging from his face like dark moss and a foul breath, if she missed one rub of a knob that she knew she should have rubbed. Now the doorknob-rubbing had stopped, and she only prayed when she came home. From habit, from memory. . . .

Prayers said, she went to the bathroom to brush her teeth, and Julian's door was ajar. He stood completely motionless staring out the window. It was a fine blue night with a strong breeze blowing though it was beginning to die down, and it was impossible not to pause (even in her transparent knee-length nightgown) to watch him.

Rebecca felt a keen sense of his life as he stood there — a solitary life that did not depend on anyone, nor did he ever hope to have it depend on anyone. Suddenly she shivered and felt depressed, and then she saw him stare at his hands and saw the small chess set cupped in them like brandy. He moved his right hand out slowly from under the set and drew a piece from its pocket — the pieces were celluloid and looked like whole fingernails — and inserted it in another square. . . . All of this by the light of the moon and blue dusty night, and now her depression

lifted as quickly as it had come. She was sure that he winked at a star outside his window.

On the tiles by the toilet as she was squeezing toothpaste on her brush she saw the little picture. It was a shock to see someone who was Julian Prim; someone who would sweepingly be him if the face were male and five years younger and did not wear a glossy crown of marcelled hair, and had perhaps a touch wider nose around the wings.

She looked at the back of the photograph. No name, no date, nothing except the stamped information: "Manheim Studio, Brooklyn, New York." She flew to her room, whipped a robe over her shoulders and knocked softly at his already open door.

"What is it? What do you want?" He sounded far away and his voice was menacing.

"I found this in the bathroom."

He looked as though he wanted to snatch the picture from her, but contained himself with effort, accepting it casually — and though caught off guard, he did not relinquish any of his hard, brassy attitude.

"Yes." He jerked his head in recognition; he and the photograph were alone together. "This is mine. . . . Thanks."

He started to turn away dismissively.

"Who is she?" Rebecca asked.

Julian swung around, as though surprised to see her still standing there.

"What are you talking about?"

"The picture."

"Oh — that's my mother."

"And you carry a photograph of her," she said gaily. "She must be awfully pleased. Not many sons would do that. It's not the thing this year."

He did not smile back. First he looked reproachful, then calculating, as if he were marshaling the nerve to ask her to leave.

"She's dead," he said. "This is an old shot."

"Julian — I'm sorry — I'm really sorry."

"You can't be," he said. "It happened a long time ago. You didn't know her."

He tried again to turn his back on her. "I'm glad you're staying here," Rebecca rushed on. "It's sort of quiet with my two brothers away. You know how boys are. Little boys. They sort of — oh — they beat you up. Nasty little creatures!"

"You mean they hit you? Leave marks?" His eyes looked all distraught as he stared at her — or, more accurately, at some spot above her brow.

"Oh, not really. I'm exaggerating."

"Exaggerating." he said. He pressed his lips into a grim line. "You're not like I am. I say what I mean. . . ."

"Well, how colorful for everyone else!"

He considered her words carefully, or at least seemed to, and then answered with dogmatic firmness, "I don't know what you're talking about." He moved back to the window and stared out at the

night, the moonlight in his hair a distinguished silver. He plunged his hands deep into his pockets and rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet.

"When I was a kid," he said abruptly, "eight or nine, I spent two weeks in the country. My mother took me to a friend's farm in the Catskills — a real farm with chickens and cows. I remember I couldn't sleep the first night, the noises were so loud. The wind in the trees, the dogs and crickets — nothing ever quieted down. The sounds were wrong. I was used to the clanging kind — subways, sirens. As a kid I always slept through them."

He paused, and Rebecca started to sketch in the silence with her own experiences, but then she sensed that he was only waiting for the words to carry him on. She inched into the room and sat on the chair next to the door.

"The days — the days were what everybody liked. I was told you wanted them to last. My mother said each one was precious. You know, all that sun and air, and a lot of activity. There were rafters to climb around on in the barn, and big piles of straw to jump into. And the hired men squirted you with warm milk right out of the cow and everyone laughed at you, and you were expected to laugh too. Sure. It was all part of the fun, the laughs. The day also meant the rows of tomatoes to plant and as I bent over in the hot sun digging up dirt, my mind was on something I'd read in a children's book about cotton and slaves.

"For me, the day made me one of those slaves. I could hardly wait for the sun to set. . . ." He swept his arm across the window, drawing the constellation of stars up close. "Then I could study the heavens. I felt like a navigator in an astrodome — alone in the night, making observations, charting the courses of the stars. I made many patterns out of the stars. The thing is, in the city there is always the haze. Only the prominent stars stand out."

Rebecca waited a long time, but he had nothing more to say. Out the window across the dark valley the wild yellow eyes of a car climbed Windmill Road. She started to say, "That was an interesting story," but she was beginning to learn simplicity the way other people learn guile, and, in truth, she did not know remotely what kind of story it was. Most anecdotes were designed either to make you laugh or to prove a point; those were the only kind she knew, but his seemed different.

She said instead, "Good night, Julian. Sleep well."

But he stood glaring solemnly out the window, and did not bother to answer.

She went back to her room and wrote for a long time in her diary. She summoned up her feelings, his face, his words. And she wondered if she would ever be someone's Calista. Maybe Julian Prim's?

She woke up with the first streak of light the next morning. Dawn brought the sky pressing in through her open window, blooming yellow in the corner. Her

heart felt giddy and gay. Then there was that note stuffed under her door — the note that would give her three uneasy days.

"You are the daughter here," it began, "but while I am here my room is mine. You disturbed me deeply by coming in that way. I was in the middle of work. You do not have the background to comprehend what I am talking about, but it was thirty minutes after you left before I was completely certain you had been here.

"I hate to sound disagreeable, but while I am a guest in your house I recommend that you abide by the following rules.

"First, do not talk to me unless I talk to you first. My attention span in terms of a problem in logic is long and deep like any good chess player's. I cannot allow anyone to break down habits that I dedicate myself to building.

"Second, I would consider it a favor if you would quit playing records after midnight. This is not a college campus. The walls in this house are thin and jazz music hurts my ears. It is so vulgar. I do not sleep well and need whatever amount I can get as I am in training for a very important tournament. It is hard for me to understand your taste. There is the music of the masters. Haydn, Purcell, Vivaldi, Bach, men of genius. I am not saying you should improve your taste at the expense of my sleep, but meant this comment as a 'friendly criticism.'

"Third, I have chessboards set up on both sides of my bed because I work on problems when I wake up in the night. Do not disturb these boards. Do not dust them or touch them. Your mother has told the maid.

"Last, do me a favor and never touch my personal belongings again. Why you took the photograph of my mother from my wallet and then returned it to me as though I had lost it is beyond the power of my imagination or reasoning."

— "But I didn't! I did *not* touch your mother's picture, I found it in the bathroom!" — For three days Rebecca dragged those words around inside her, and more words — fishwife recriminations, arrows poisoned with her gall, all of them useless when she finally faced him.

They were alone in the living room. I had driven into the city and her mother was visiting in Rye. Rebecca had cut class so that she could have this chance to clear herself. She could not tell whether what she said communicated anything to him or not; he frowned disapprovingly at a print on the wall of naked men blowing on curved horns, then looked down at his hands.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Yes, you do. Julian. You know perfectly well," she raged quietly. She wanted to slap his face — slap it and slap it until that bored, haughty expression was gone for good, replaced by a hint of human

warmth. "You lied — you told a miserable lie. You have some nerve, suggesting I was in your room going through your things!"

"I did not lie," he protested. "The photograph was gone when I looked for it."

"It's my fault you lost it?"

"No. You don't understand. I never lose things."

"Call it anything you want. Just don't blame me."

"I tell you," he insisted, "I have never lost anything in my life. Not once." He shouldered by Rebecca and walked toward the door. "You reason like a woman — exactly. You figure if you say enough loud enough you can get me in the wrong. . . ." He stood with his hands in his pockets, glaring fiercely through the screen door at the flower garden. After a moment, he said, "Maybe someone else took it."

"No one touched your damn picture. You misplaced it. Why do you have to act so neurotic?"

His eyes slid by her (they had not yet met hers) and his lips struggled with an abortive attempt at a smile. "Are you a virgin, is that what's eating you? You act like one."

"That happens to be none of your business."

"You definitely act like one. You act frustrated."

"I want an apology," she said. "I did not take your picture, and if you don't apologize I'm going to scream. I mean it! I'll scream rape, I'll scream bloody murder — just wait! Jazz at three in the morning!

I'll paint over the squares on your precious chessboards —"

"Are you crazy?" he demanded.

"That's odd. I was just going to ask you the same question."

"I'm sure I seem strange to you," he said. "Well, I am strange. I lead a strange life. A chess player is not like other people."

Rebecca smiled prettily. "Neither is a girl."

She blushed at the way she stood as she delivered that line — stagily, hipshot, a pose she had learned from watching her best friend, Rita. Her face flushed hot and a thread of pain worked with needles behind her eyes.

"You make no sense," he said at last. He looked at her with tense, miserable eyes, then flung open the screen door and marched out onto the porch.

"Muffle, muffle, muffle," he said.

Rebecca raced across the room and out the door. He was shading his eyes from the sun so that she could not see his face.

"What did you say?" she asked him.

"Maybe I misplaced the picture," Julian said.

"Fine. We won't talk about it any more."

"Well, I'm going to the beach now," he said quickly.

She followed along beside him, down the stairs and out to the road. She looked at him radiantly. saying, "That was the silliest quarrel. All quarrels are so pa-

thetic. I can't *stand* them. And they're comic, too, the way both sides will insist — "

"Where do you think you're going?" he demanded.

"With you. . . ."

"No," he said, "I have work to do. I do all kinds of calisthenics."

"Oh, I just *adore* calisthenics."

"Not that kind. I don't do that kind."

"How sad for you," she said in her low, seductive register.

"You better stay home," he said. "You'll be bored."

"But it's so sticky. I need a good cold plunge in the Sound."

He sighed. "I can't stop you. If you want to come, come."

They walked along in silence and Julian stopped beside the road and broke off a stem of alfalfa. He stuck it in his mouth and chewed earnestly, as though it were the thing to do, remembered from his two weeks on a farm years ago.

"You make me nervous," she said to break the silence.

He did not answer, but walked even faster.

"You have such a cold personality."

The idea seemed to please him, and Rebecca was sure that his chest puffed out a little. "We have a long walk ahead of us," he said. "Can you walk fast?"

"You shall see," she replied, "how fast I am."

A double entendre, Rebecca thought — and two

hours later, without his even knowing how it happened, or even, for a moment, that it *had* happened, he kissed her on the mouth: once, rather at an angle, reluctantly but decisively, and with a firm raw force that meant she was getting as well as giving (she hoped that she was giving) the Major Kiss of her life. She knew that she had never been kissed until he kissed her. The Eastport-Darien-Greenwich make-outs, the college boys from Swarthmore and Princeton and Yale and Penn, with their soft pretty mouths and educated tongues, had left her cold.

And here is how it happened. She skidded on the wet sand (planned), turning her ankle (planned), near enough for him to dive and catch her before she fell (planned); her arms went around him (planned), her lips opened in a moan (quick improvisation), his blue eyes grew large in alarm; she pulled his head down, and rocking desperately under the weight of her body his mouth crushed hers (planned climax) — just like in the movies! It worked!

"Julian!" she cried ecstatically, "my ankle hurts something awful. Why don't you drop me over there?"

Also planned.

And so, the appalled numb victim carried her quickly to a sandy cove penned between two columns of rock, a shadowy cool place that most people who came to the Sound would never use, and he set her down like good china and hovered over her rigidly

while she massaged her ankle. He could not look her in the eye.

A heavy silence pressed down on them. Rebecca pointed out where Long Island loomed out of the water across the blue breadth of Sound. Boats with brilliant sails blew about, the smaller ones hugging the contours of the shore. A wind raced out of the sun, sending spray and sand along the cove's mouth, and she wondered if she liked him, she wondered if the hollow drum beating inside her with beautiful pain meant that she really liked him.

"Usually you can't see Long Island," she said, "or it's just a white speck. The day has to be awfully clear."

He said nothing and they sat for a long time without speaking. Finally she reached for his hand; he drew it back out of her grasp, his fingers digging shallow ridges in the sand.

"What a blunder that was," he said gloomily. "It didn't mean anything."

"It was an accident," Rebecca said.

"That's right, an accident. . . . You know, things just happen sometimes. Most things you can plan, but once in a while something happens."

The sun dripped gold on him, making him all resplendent in his white T-shirt and dark trunks. His body was lean but much better than she would have expected, more athletic. Hard and brown.

"But I usually control things." he said, his face

frozen. "I mean, you're nothing to me — how many hours have I known you out of my whole life? You're not even in focus. You're dim to me."

"Well, maybe it wasn't an accident. Maybe you wanted to kiss me, so you kissed me. It could be just that simple, believe it or not." She wiggled her ankle back and forth, testing it for a break or a bad sprain, though it did not hurt at all, actually.

"I wouldn't say I *wanted* to kiss you. You were — well, I was carrying you, and then. . . . I don't know. The thing is, something just happened."

"You know what you look like right now?" said Rebecca. "You look — but exactly! — like those statues we have at the house. Mr. and Mrs. Gloom — they're Greek. Do you have any other expressions in your repertoire? A smile, for instance?"

"I'm not a movie actor," Julian said. "I can't just turn things on and off. . . ." Then he looked at her and said, "Becky," and his husky voice saying her name lent it a magic that it had never had before, "in the first place, that kiss meant nothing. I'm not like the kind of weakies you probably run around with. Like that character you went out with the other night, Richie somebody-or-other. I wouldn't bother to spit on him. I do a certain thing, one thing I will learn to do better than anybody, and it's like taking vows — devotion is everything. I don't have any friends my own age. I know chess players, I talk to them about

chess. I know maybe twenty, twenty-five chess jokes and I rotate them when I lecture. The rest is playing. School never meant anything to me; when I dumped it I said, thank God all that crap is over. The insane teachers, the stupid lessons. From now on it's the road all the time — exhibitions, lectures, tournaments all over the world. . . ." He flourished his hands at the bright water. "No time for anything else. And I don't want anything else. Nothing."

Rebecca looked up at him, at his long light hair falling across his face as he stared broodingly at the sand. It was strange he did not know how much her body wanted him. There are times, she thought, if only the right boy could sense it, when a girl would give him anything.

"I'm attracted to you, Julian."

He stared at her. 'You don't know me," he said. "I don't know you. Talking that way is no good. You can talk yourself into something."

"Maybe. . . ."

They watched two bathers run down the beach to the water for a final dip, and the silvery "Don't! Don't!" of the woman, captured by the man and lifted and swept out into the blue water, came up to them on the sunny wind.

"Not maybe," he said. "I don't put on acts for you — for anybody. Sure, I could do it. I could act sincere and whisper to you sincerely like the smooth idiots

you know. Then if I figured you wanted to go all the way — well, I could be so sincere and end up putting a check next to your name in my little black book."

"Do you carry a little black book?"

"That was a manner of speaking."

"Julian — you're warped! Where do you get such wild ideas?"

"I'm not naïve," he said. "I've been around. All this talk bores me," he said, jumping to his feet. "I have some running to do."

"No!" Rebecca shouted. "You sit down and let me have *my* say now. . . ."

The novelty of her emotions seemed to be tearing away his cool suavity; his face was pale as he knelt in front of her in the sand, a blue vein pumping quickly in his throat.

"I want to be kissed by you," she said. "I have never asked anyone before. It isn't easy to ask."

"It would be a mistake," he said, shaking his head. "It would be a terrible mistake."

"I want you to kiss me."

"You only want to kiss yourself. You're very conceited."

"I don't think I am." She looked at her fingers digging in the sand. "And I think you do want to kiss me — but you're afraid. . . ." As she bent forward her hair moved against her cheeks, and she felt his hand lightly touch the back of her soft upper arm, and she wondered if it might be the way her hair

shone in the sun, when amber smoldered out of the black, but anyway, she could tell when the touch turned to pressure and then she looked up and pressed toward him — she shut her eyes, feeling the gritty sand in her tight fist. She said, "Julian," in a funny sigh, and "Julian!" again as he drew her to him, and his chin knifed into her cheek as he moved his mouth around. When they came out of that kiss she was smiling and he was still frowning, but she was not female for nothing and she knew that everything had changed between them.

They stayed on the beach for hours, kissing the time away. The long summer dusk had come, dusting the air with a soft light and flinging into the sky the first and brightest stars.

"Oh, Julian," she said. "This is going to be the most *splendid* summer."

He smiled at her and shook his head as though he did not know what to say and stared out over the Sound.

"Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. . . ." Rebecca's eyes were squeezed shut and her only wish was that she knew exactly what to wish.

✠ ✠ 6 ✠ ✠

The next week went by like a single long kiss: no time for school, no time even to think for fear the happiness would fade into a dream. Rebecca and Julian became romantic explorers in her yellow Karmann Ghia. They drove out to Coney Island and went on all the rides — the roller coaster, that terrible Ferris wheel with the chairs that slide forward when you pass over the top, giving you the feeling of falling into space. And they ate hot dogs and knishes and drank a lot of Cokes. And from there to Brownsville, where Julian pointed out houses and streets and old memories of things.

They stood by a fence and looked inside at an enormous brown gash in the earth where a housing development was being built, and Julian swung Rebecca around and gave her a long kiss. Then he leaned his face up against the fence and said, "The

house I was born in was here. Over near where the man in the red shirt is waving. I was going to show it to you." Rebecca put her arm through his, pushing softly against his ribs, but he seemed absorbed in what he had said. They stood side by side examining the man in the red shirt as though he stood for the house that was gone now forever. "I meant to come back once or twice. Two weeks ago I'll bet it was still standing."

That week was a week of walking and seeing and holding hands. It was a week of kissing. They took a ferry out to Staten Island and held hands at the rail, watching the water winking in the sun. They went out to the Statue of Liberty and climbed to the top, and at the top Julian took Rebecca in his arms and kissed her — not gently, but with passion and strength.

"This is like being in the top of a gigantic rook," he said. "I like it."

They walked along the slip streets at the Battery and watched a single gull pick at fishbones in the street. There was a child somewhere deep in the Battery, because to the south of them a blue kite blotted the sky. Another day they walked around Greenwich Village, pausing briefly to watch the chess players at the stone tables in the southwest corner of Washington Square. "I used to play down here in the summer when I was around thirteen," Julian said. "I had a few pigeons. Twenty-five, fifty cents a game. You see that

guy over there with the felt hat? He used to be a master. He's been on drugs for more than twenty years, but he still draws the biggest crowds in the park. He plays a pretty game — delicate, a little weak." Then someone recognized Julian and they moved on, east, to Astor Place and the secondhand bookstores along Fourth Avenue. In a dark stack Rebecca found an old chess book that was new to Julian; he was very pleased. She leaned back, feeling the outline of book spines against her own, and gave herself up to a harsh, exciting kiss.

They visited Radio City Music Hall and the RCA Building and stood looking down on the tables at Rockefeller Center where people in bright summer clothes bent over their food. Then the shade of a sudden summer storm traveled across the tables as fast as one of the skaters in winter, and although there had been only mild portents of the storm in the delicate sky they were quickly drenched. So they walked into a Forty-second Street movie, and sat in the balcony drying out and kissing. Who knows the name of the film? Gregory Peck was the star, and it existed, if at all, somewhere on the margin of their dreams.

They spent a morning wandering around Times Square, ducking into chess parlors and novelty shops, and they walked up Broadway with its racy and adventurous glitter from Forty-second to Fifty-ninth, stopping for hot dogs and papaya juice and candied

apples, and Julian put a dollar's worth of nickels in the Pokerino game. He won a pack of Old Golds which they gave to the first seedy stranger they saw. Then they walked down the Avenue of the Americas and east toward Fifth Avenue on what Julian's father had once called the street of beards and diamonds — Forty-seventh. They ate at Schrafft's and Rebecca spilled a glass of sherry and got a fit of giggles, and another day at the automat on Fourteenth Street, where Julian used to sit upstairs with a cup of tea and study chess for hours at a time. They had lunch in a lovely Italian restaurant on Mulberry Street. It was cheap and good, and the waitress served chilled white wine with their baked bass and salad. Rebecca drank the whole half bottle.

One afternoon they ate raw clams, two dozen of them, sitting on a big rock at the southeast foot of Central Park. Then they walked west to the Hudson River, a blue flash scrawled beneath the pale sky. They stopped in front of a Greek store-front church and Julian stared at it, and as they walked along again he burst out in a torrent of words the way he sometimes would, as though to make up for all their silences.

"I remember when I was a little boy," he said, "watching my mother rock in a chair night after night, crying. When she cried she made a hollow sound. If you didn't see her face you might think she was laughing, or pretending to laugh. My father — he

would be out somewhere drinking himself into a coma. I would sit there with her and play games to take her mind off it. Parcheesi, Monopoly, checkers, all kinds of card games. She was a brilliant bridge player. We played everything. She liked games." Julian turned to Rebecca. "Did I ever tell you my mother was beautiful?"

"I don't think so."

"She was beautiful. When she cried she still was beautiful, with her eyes all swollen and her face pale. . . . In a way I can't blame my father, though, and I didn't blame him then. Our home was no place for a man to be. We were poor, it was a tough neighborhood to get a job in, and she was always after him. Do this, do that. They had come so far down in the world, and he was a lot older than she was — twenty years, maybe more. She married him because he had talent once. He was a successful portrait painter in England. But then the drinking began and he pulled her into the Brooklyn world where he had relatives — and she was out of place. She never belonged. The truth is, he never got through to me at all. We must have bored him. . . . You know — I connect two things together. Her crying, which seemed to always come after dinner, and this happened over a long period of time — months, maybe a year — maybe she was getting sick then. . . . I connect that with her nagging at him in their bedroom once. I used to get close to the wall and listen. She was saying, 'Why

don't you sleep with me? Can't you? Has liquor taken everything out of you?' and him saying, 'It's not the liquor. I just don't want you and all your goyim ideas any more. You had your chance. . . .'" Julian glared miserably into Rebecca's eyes. "She tried to suck me into her undertow of sorrow. That's the one thing I can never forgive her for."

"Oh, Julian — that's a terrible story!"

"It doesn't touch me," he said. "But I'll tell you something. I know a few things now. I may not be a gentleman, but the woman I marry will have to be a lady. Or learn to be. My mother missed the boat. The thing about a lady is, she always smells nice, she is well groomed and humorous. She keeps her pain to herself. A lady is never vain about her mind. She doesn't try to keep her husband under lock and key."

"I think you're crazy, Julian. You couldn't stand someone like that."

"I'm a chess player," he said. "The woman I marry has to be clever enough to take a back seat to that."

They had many talks like that one; mostly Julian's talks. And all the time they walked. And wherever they went they kissed. New York is full of big buildings and little hidden streets and the very chicest men and women that make you want to kiss; there is a nervous enchantment about it that makes you want to kiss. New York is an environment in which to kiss. They kissed on subways and on buses and on ferrys and in hallways and in restaurants. They kissed on

street corners and in museums. They kissed in Central Park and Bryant Park, in dusty bookstores and in the cool vaults of commercial lobbies along Madison Avenue. They kissed in the soft, deep-summer twilight outside the Biltmore, outside the Algonquin, outside the Taft. And Julian talked about the past — as though he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself as a boy that had gone into playing chess.

Paul Marcus lived in a house on Washington Square with wine-colored bricks and white shutters that gleamed in the afternoon sun. Toward the end of that week Julian and five other masters were given a dinner there in honor of having won major tournaments the year before, and Julian invited Rebecca along. There was a buffet dinner, drinks, soft Vivaldi sounds from all the rooms — and a speaker's table in the living room where the players would be awarded their trophies.

As soon as they arrived, Julian left Rebecca with Paul Marcus and went looking for all his chess friends. A few minutes later, in a group, they informed Paul Marcus that they would not stand at the table to accept their trophies, nor would they say anything — and would it be all right if they went into the parlor and played chess? Paul Marcus shrugged, for the curious social antics of chess players were not new to him.

Julian walked across the room to talk to Mark

Friedman, an old master he liked very much, a man in his sixties. The way they both talked with their arms at their sides, their mouths barely moving, they could have been father and son. Perhaps it was the smoky light shadowing Julian's face that made Rebecca think of Fowler's Falls — not that first day, when she had brought Julian home from the station and he was so distant and cold, but the second time, just yesterday, when they sat on the riverbank under the giant elm's shadow, and the blue and the mauve that the elm poured down on the brook was lovely and she could see a silver flash — a school of fish running swiftly by. And he kissed her. She felt again, standing there watching him, all the flame in her stomach, the dropping-away, crushed-egg feeling, and she stroked again the blueness of his warm hair in the shadows of the elm. Oh, she thought, you brought me with you, Julian Prim. You brought me with you to meet your friends, to see the way you live your life, to let them see how you live yours — you brought me!

For everyone except the players huddled now around a chess table munching food and moving pieces around the board and laughing at their secret little chess jokes, the arrival of the English actor Bryan Pleasant was the evening's dramatic moment. If you were to name four famous movie stars, the ones that count today, he would be on the list. Mastroianni, Belmondo, Brando and Bryan Pleasant. His lean rough face, handsome in a vain and Viking style

and full of finely netted lines of dissipation, was middle-aged, though he was only thirty. Paul Marcus told Rebecca that chess meant more to him than acting or women or money, or even drinking, which he was famous for, and that tonight, full of cocktail courage, he would challenge Julian Prim. His pride, though, would not allow him to take advantage of a master's fame: he would insist on playing for money.

They were introduced, Paul Marcus moved away, and Rebecca was alone with Bryan Pleasant. His soft English voice, cultured and terribly sexy, was like a wild tonic, putting her in a party mood. She noticed that he perspired heavily — a pale mustache of drops circled his upper lip, and damp strands of golden hair fell like crayon marks across his forehead. He swirled his drink and smiled down at her from his six and a half feet or more.

"Consider," he said, "the martini. A mighty drink! A friend indeed! Fuel for the man whose path is precipitous and whose prospects are mostly downhill." Bryan Pleasant lifted his glass. "We salute the very dry, very cold American martini — ever loyal to man's deepest needs. I'm mere bones and dust without it — a quaking zero. . . ." He paused, but before Rebecca could respond he added, "How old are you?"

"Almost twenty-one." She hated herself immediately for not having simply said twenty.

He leaned toward her. "Do you love me?" he said low in her ear.

All she could do was stare at him. His breath smelled like dry toast.

"Don't be afraid to tell me if you do — it's hardly a novelty. But it doesn't matter. I'm spoken for."

"You mean you're married?"

"I'm married," he said, "*and* I'm spoken for. You don't know very much about me, do you?"

"No."

"You don't read the movie magazines," he accused her with owlish solemnity.

"I'm afraid I don't."

"You become more attractive by the minute. . . ." His eyes followed hers, and he added, "Is Julian Prim your lad?"

"We came together."

"And you'll leave together?"

"Yes."

"Oh, you look so proper and American!" he said. "I adore this country — the pilgrim spirit, the puritanical heart. You find everything here. The big breast fetish, funeralphilia, baseball, mom — the mind full of harmless deliriums. . . . Have a taste?"

"No, thanks."

"I'll bet you never have done."

"I prefer Scotch. And pardon me, but I think you're silly about America. You probably have that boring idea there's something wrong with women here, but you're lucky I'm not some girls I know. They're very virile, or lusty or whatever, and a lot of them would

gladly lavish their charms on you. All their charms."

He was not amused by the turn in the conversation. "Look at my hand! Look! Watch my fingers curl. . . . See? My hand is crooked in its five o'clock position, the sun over the yardarm and all that — it's my hand-seeking-the-glass position. Even on a movie set — even in the presence of heartbreaking flowers like you — comes five and my hand automatically assumes this position, and I race like a ship, masts down, for my ocean of oblivion."

"Poor, smashed you," Rebecca said, laughing.

He spread his arms and said, " 'Away, each pale, self-brooding spark/ That goes truth-hunting in the dark,/ Away from our carousing!/ To Pallas we resign such fowls —/ Grave birds of Wisdom! ye're but owls,/ and all your trade but *mousing!*. . . .' "

Now his voice became more theatrical, huskier: " 'My merry men all, here's punch and wine,/ and spicy bishop, drink divine!/ Let's live while we are able./ While Mirth and Sense sit hand in glove,/ This Don Philosophy we'll shove/ Dead drunk beneath the table!' "

"I like that. I like the feeling of it."

"Coleridge."

"I will take a sip of your martini."

He looked into Rebecca's eyes, right down to her soul, in a way that made her blush and said, "I like little girls."

"Even little girls of twenty?"

"Little is as little does." And he added, "Don't look now, but Prim is staring at us. At you with shame, at me with hate."

"You think so?"

"Absolutely. Give me my glass back."

"I think you're silly."

He was no longer smiling when he said, "I will lose to him tonight. You know all about that sort of thing, don't you? Though in point of fact you can't, you can't conceive of this — the fatal but beautiful pattern. But *Prim* knows, he knows what I know. That I shall be his pigeon. The loser to his winner, and that is what we are here for, and what it is all about."

"Don't you want to win?"

"That," he said irritably, "is a stupid opaque question, unworthy of your fine instincts." He swallowed the rest of his drink. "I like your lad — I've followed his short career. But liking him is unimportant next to the envy I feel. Acting may not kill me in the end, destroy my spirit, but it does set me to brooding, to trying to prove the unprovable — how good or bad *am* I? Is my talent anything but a fraud, an accident of looks and some strange charisma that celluloid brings to life? Your lad now — the measurements exist in his art. If he plays well enough he wins. He loses if someone plays better. Simple."

Then later he and Julian were introduced, and after a brief exchange, mostly Bryan Pleasant's, they sat down at a table.

"What kind of game do we play?" he asked, smiling.

"Knight odds," Julian said. "Five minutes on the clock. Four for me. You have white all the time. Buck a game."

"Succinct," Bryan Pleasant said. "And fair."

"It's standard," Julian replied coldly, "in a patzer game."

"Patzer? Funny — I thought I was being a pigeon tonight."

To break the tension Paul Marcus, pausing by the table, said, "For an actor he's not bad, Julian. Better watch your step."

"Paul," Bryan Pleasant said, "be a kind chap and bring me a fresh libation. Gin on the rocks."

"Drink and chess don't mix," Julian mumbled, staring at his hands. "It ruined Larry Richards."

Bryan Pleasant only smiled. He moved a pawn and punched his clock.

Julian's attitude bothered Rebecca; the last thing she wanted was for him to seem boorish, to seem less polished than the actor.

"J'adoube," Julian said, as his thumb accidentally touched his queen. Then he hurled a look at Rebecca that told her she had not been behaving herself, and she tried to smile his mood away but he would have none of it.

He won two games easily. Then he sat back in his

chair, his thumbs hooked in his pants, and said, "Double or nothing?"

"Splendid," Bryan Pleasant said. He seemed unaffected by all that he had had to drink.

Rebecca concentrated on the pieces as the game progressed, and she began to see them as human — as travelers moving with deep perplexity and doubt through a foreign land (the domain of King Julian), where sentries, knowing every tree and stone and blade of grass, lurked. And then struck with sudden concerted power, the queen appearing and slashing at the enemy like a great enraged beast, the knights charging into the fray, and men falling everywhere and moaning, the dead accumulating, and finally the deathly silence of decision — fourteen moves, and King Julian smote the enemy.

" — How could actors, people like that, have the mind for it?" someone said across the room.

Julian set up the black pieces. "Another game?" he asked.

"Certainly," Bryant Pleasant answered. "I'm just warming up."

More people gathered around the table, and Rebecca wondered if Julian was playing to them when he said, "Okay, double or nothing again, and I'll take three minutes to your five. What do you say?"

"Splendid," Bryan Pleasant mumbled, bowing his head toward the table, his eyes almost on a level with the pieces.

Julian won that game with no trouble, and the next, and Rebecca thrilled to his winning. No contempt for the loser was involved in it — in fact her heart went out to Bryan Pleasant, bent over the board, golden hair flowing down over his face — but her man was winning and she was glad that he was. And Julian's expression as he looked at her softened because he knew that she was proud of him.

Julian won again with two minutes to Bryan Pleasant's five; then he struck another minute off his time, winning that game; then he played with thirty seconds on his clock and won that game too; and, at double or nothing each game, he had now won sixty-four dollars. Something in his deepest roots made Julian smile across the table and say, "This is a terrible mistake. You shouldn't be playing me. This is just ridiculous." He shook his head from side to side. "Why don't you quit?"

"I would just as soon go on," Bryan Pleasant said.

"But what the hell!" Julian broke out impatiently. Then struggling not to say more he quickly set the black pieces up again. "Fifteen seconds," he said. "I will give myself fifteen seconds."

"Fifteen?" Bryan Pleasant repeated incredulously.

Paul Marcus grinned. "You'll just have time enough to make the moves."

"Maybe something to spare," said Julian. He looked up and the blue in his eyes had turned the color of a cold green sea. But he lost. He was forced to move

too quickly, and his blunder was so obvious that even Rebecca saw it right after he made it. He stood and shook hands with Bryan Pleasant and said very seriously, "I'm afraid I won't be able to play any more. The smoke. I can hardly see the board."

On the drive home to Connecticut he was in a brooding mood. Rebecca detoured to the Sound so that they could sit awhile under the stars. At the end of the dock, tangled in the ropes to which, gently swaying, the boats were tied, hung the white light of the moon. Julian kissed Rebecca slowly with his lips open, moving; then, looking into her eyes, he said, "That was an alibi, about the cigarette smoke. I sometimes have this feeling — invincibility. . . . It's like a sickness. . . . It comes over you like a fever and you lose all sense of the way things are." He laughed. "I mean who can you beat in fifteen seconds? Even if you're God. And I'm not God. It's stupid to have to say that, but sometimes I have to say it. . . ."

Rebecca wrote: "The brilliant winter nights of frost lift my heart, and our ancient dogwood that blooms in the spring with white stars lifts my heart, and my heart lifts the most, the very most of all, when I wake up after a new snow, spread out everywhere tenderly, and see the reflection of one million moons in the tree branches outside my window. Julian, Julian — share this with me! Share all the winters of my life, all that I have to share, all that I feel and can

give. Then, all that we are, and so much more that we will become with time, can be ours to share forever.

"My current prayer. . . .

"Four more days, fewer than a hundred hours, and he has grown four days more beautiful like Stendhal's branch that collects crystals in the depth of the mine. . . ."

Julian had spent the day in New York, seeing the just-appointed Tournament Director, and he returned late that afternoon in a bad temper. Rebecca started to tell him that her mother had questioned her closely about why she hadn't been attending classes, but he was husbandly deaf to the subject. So she asked if he wanted anything. Some soup or a sandwich.

"Where is your mother?"

"Upstairs napping."

"Then let's go to the beach."

It was a humid day and the Sound felt cold and good. After swimming hard they sat in their sheltered cove. When Julian turned his face to the sun Rebecca could see that his skin was drawn terribly tight on his face and looked gray under the tan. His eyes were red and glassy. He was still in a pet, so she went into the water again, swimming a languid backstroke and staring up at the sky; then she felt a warm pang for him and ran in fast and flopped down beside him.

"What's the matter?" Julian did not answer. Rebecca squinted her eyes at the ocean which suddenly

became a great curved shell, big enough to hold up to the ear of the world. "Julian, what is it?"

"They're out to get me," he said.

"The chess committee?"

"They scheduled me for every easy game first, then all the hard ones — I play Berlin last." He scooped up a handful of sand and let it sift slowly through his fingers. "Berlin and me last, that's okay. That's show business, I guess."

"But you feel they're out to get you?"

"Yes," he insisted. "Berlin has the perfect schedule. The hard games first when he's fresh and can handle them. Then with those out of the way, behind him, he can coast a little, getting a second wind. Then me last. Mine is bad. My last five games are with the five toughest players. It's all fixed to help Berlin."

"You really think it's all planned?"

"Sure, it is," he said. "I don't play along with the American Chess Foundation, so they'll try to get rid of me. Those Foundation people expect you to suck up to the patrons. Play friendly games with them. Lose once in a while. Be pleasing to them and show gratitude. . . ." Julian pounded his fists on the sand.

"I can't do it," he said. "There's something wrong with me. I spit on them with every look, in every little thing I do. The one thing they want to do, they want to buy their way into my life. They want a piece of me, like I'm the action. I won't let them. It would take a whore to let them, Becky. I guess I can play

chess on some sidewalk on the Bowery by drawing sixty-four squares with chalk and using stones or dog turds. . . . You can't let them take everything away from you." He smiled. "But I sound crazy, don't I? Don't I sound like a fool?"

"Not to me," she said.

He stretched out full length with his laced hands cupped under his head. "Patrons are always wanting. They want my promise. They want Berlin's international reputation. They want Paul Marcus's intellectual brilliance. They want Peter Sturdivant's good looks and social background. Want, want, want. And what's worse, they get, too. Money gets, and they've got Berlin. He really fills the bill. He loses friendly games to the rich and gets along with the goyim, and he tells nice lies to the wives of patrons. He brown-noses every sickening moment of his life."

"Except when he plays chess," Rebecca said.

"Except then. You're right. Then he fights to win, then he claws along on my level — right on equal terms. But he won't get me, I can tell you that. He knows I've been waiting for him — for the chance to massage him. The Harry Golden of chess will fall. I will break through. Then next spring I qualify to enter the Interzonal. In Buenos Aires."

"Buenos Aires?" Rebecca suddenly felt frightened and she knew that her voice darkened with artificiality. "Would you have to go way down there?"

"The Interzonal I play in is there," he said, and reflected. "You hear a lot about the girls in Argentina. They go around naked, their skin is soft brown and glistens at night. Don't you know they carry fruit on their heads in baskets and walk in bare feet? Don't you read the *National Geographic*?"

"Oh, Julian!"

"Why don't you know those things? Why are you so dumb?"

"That's Africa!"

"Oh, yeah? You go down there and what you do is, you play chess maybe two, three hours in the morning. You get that out of the way, then it's the beach, the bongo drums, good white rum on the rocks. Then siesta. When you wake up all the girls with things on their heads are all around you, and you go and drink the native wine and listen to the sounds of the steelband music. And — you know. That's the way it is. That's what an Interzonal is."

"I like it when you joke."

"Then why aren't you laughing?"

"I am, inside. It usually means I'm nervous when I laugh."

"I'll tell you something," Julian said. "I feel a little nervous right now. If I don't take Berlin I may have to wait a long time for another chance. He hates me so much, that fat oaf. In fact that might get him in trouble, it may hurt his game. But let's say I do lose,

let's say I get involved in a bad position — well, I'm not kidding when I say the Foundation will try to disqualify me next year."

"Do you think they can?"

"They can make it hot for me," Julian said. "They don't like someone who takes their rules home and reads them. I rock the boat. I don't just accept the rules."

"I'm the same way," Rebecca told him. "At college. Home. Everywhere."

"I accept nothing," Julian said. "I pore over those laws and bylaws and if there's anything I don't like, something bad for the chess player, something like that, well I just don't go along. I yell about it. I don't play. And when I don't play — believe me, this is a fact — American chess is dull."

"Conceited!"

"Why do you think your father is doing a story on me?"

"I was only kidding, Julian."

"We're as bad as the Russians," he said, "every bit as bad. They fix draws between themselves to halve points — that's their way of cheating. You can guide a top scorer to victory that way. They cheat, they lie — all in the name of the hammer and sickle. That's *their* excuse. But what about things here? We beat our brains out and we depend on the patrons to keep us from starving. We love chess as much as the Russians, and if you play chess it's hard for anything

else to matter much. But all the players except me and Berlin hold down full-time jobs. We travel thousands of miles for a match, a lot of times paying our own fare — which reminds me about Friedman. You know, the old man you met the other night? Very sharp, very tough to beat. Well, he took a bus all the way from New York to Los Angeles for a big tournament a few years back. Bus fumes are terrible — and all those stops and the bad food. Friedman was put in the hospital after he got there — dysentery. He never got to play. Half the time the big backers don't come through. I tell you it's not too good. No one really cares."

"I care."

"I'm talking about patrons," Julian said. "They put up a couple thousand dollars — write-off money — and they want your birthright. I wish I'd been a ball player, I swear to God!"

"I said I care, Julian."

He got to his feet and looked down at Rebecca, his expression hard. "I doubt it," he said roughly. "Caring is one thing. This is another — this infatuation. What's happening between us."

"What is happening?" she said.

"We like each other. All right, that's just fine. But it's different from caring about chess. It's me, not chess — that's what you care about."

But what was wrong with that, she thought. Was that any reason for him to get angry? She wanted to

tell him that he was different from anyone she had ever known, from all the boys who think the supreme act in life is to cool it — the country club cowboys, the hard drinkers like Richie Davidson, and all those idiots who take goofballs and sniff airplane glue — all those who are already so brazen and utterly superficial. They call each other "Ringo" and "Old Sport" and imagine they somehow qualify for a Fitzgerald drama — but they lack all splendor, or anyway there is no Fitzgerald around in that crowd to be their Boswell. You marry a Richie Davidson and you end up a drunk or a whore without portfolio — and very, very rich.

She wanted to tell Julian he wasn't like that, or like the other ones either — the world-savers with their beards and petitions and hot hands, or the bright, racketing boys who took you to horror movies for laughs and read the New York *Times* all day Sunday and kissed you with their eyes blinking ambitiously behind their glasses. She wanted to say, Julian — you are like no one else. She wanted to tell him that she had fallen in love.

But she said instead, "Why are you angry? Is it a crime to care about you?"

"I would rather not talk about it," he said. "Talking makes me tired."

So they swam until the sun wheeled into the western sky, until her bones felt as liquid as the ocean beneath her. Rebecca removed her suit and let her

body expand into the silken air in order to feel the day's softness in every pore. Watching her, Julian took off his trunks — and they were both very aware that they did not touch, not even hands. They swam way out where the water turned cool; then, treading water and touching at the shoulders, they enjoyed a silence that was theirs, born out of all the communication between them since they had met. When Rebecca tired, they swam slowly into shore, feeling the warm ocean beneath them and the cold stars on their backs.

They stepped onto the sand and stood there, staring at each other's naked body. They were a few feet apart, but Julian made no move to come closer. The wind made goose bumps on the soft skin of his buttocks, his hips.

"You are beautiful," he said.

"Like the women who carry baskets of fruit? As beautiful as that?"

"Better."

"You're beautiful, too," Rebecca said.

She swallowed hard and the muddy beat of her heart hurt her chest. She had never seen a man without his clothes on before. Matthew was always very careful around her, and Timothy was still half girl when he went away to camp — hairless and with the tiniest little penis, a mere needle. Julian's was not much bigger, all shriveled from water like a turtle's neck, only defenseless and white, with a chevron of

pale hair over it — the only thing about his body you could call disappointing, and she looked just the briefest part of a second. The rest of him she liked better than herself. He came straight down from chest to hips, matted lightly all over with a golden down of hair, and with outjutting ridges at the waist just like Matthew — not her hourglass figure with the bulbs of buttocks and breasts bottom and top. Except for white feet and what the trunks covered (usually), he looked as brown as the sand.

All of this seeing took seconds, their eyes racing.

"Becky," he said.

Her throat felt hot and she could not answer him, not a word.

"Get your suit on. Put it on right now."

As they walked home along the darkening country roads, feeling on their bodies a cool breath of twilight wind, it was inevitable that they would talk — and about different things from before. Rebecca told him that she was a virgin.

"So am I," he said.

"Have you had any experience?"

"This is the truth. Until I met you I never kissed a girl."

"Not even once?"

"I mean on the mouth," he said. "Never. Cousins and aunts — I've kissed a few. You kiss them on the cheek."

"This is absolutely the strangest thing," Rebecca

said. "You kiss so naturally, so well — as though you'd practiced for years."

He looked at her. "You sound like you know," he said. "Have you kissed many guys?"

Rebecca stopped, tilted her head at him, and flung out her arms. "Oh, hundreds!" she cried, addressing the audience of trees all around them. "Haunted war heroes on summer cruises, hobbling around on crutches and drinking to forget. I have restored them with the magic of my lips. And then, of course, I mustn't forget those closet kisses at holiday parties in Westport. And the fathers of the boys! Gin-soaked and with the mottled remains of long romantic faces, craving the bloom of my youth — hoping to blot out the scars of bloody proxy fights, the incessant demands of bitter suburban wives, and poor train service. Ah, yes, ah, yes — my lips are *ed*ucated, so*phis*ticated!"

"All right," he said. "All right."

"Sure," she told him, "I've been kissed. I've kissed back, too. And that disgusting word for something very nice — petting. I guess I'm ripe. You know, don't you, that no normal girl can get through college intact? Not any more. That's what the books say."

"Did you ever really like it?"

"Some. I have to be honest."

"Was it ever like with us?" he said.

"Never."

"Like this," and he turned Rebecca toward him

and pulled her close. She let herself go in that kiss, standing crushed against him, with her mouth open and her legs apart. His hot tongue moved into her mouth and their thighs were pressed tight together, and she felt herself draining into him — all blood, all heartbeat, the saliva on her lips, all into him, his, all of her girlish dreams, her vague yearnings, everything, all of her.

"Oh, Julian!"

"Like this?" he said.

"Never like this. Never, never."

"You like the way I kiss you?"

"I don't have to tell you. You know."

"Now you," he said. "Now you kiss me."

Fluttering like a bird's wing, her tongue darted in and flicked at his tongue, his teeth, trilling with passion, but playful, suggestive, where his had been more forceful, and finally he sucked at it until the roots hurt. They held each other for a moment and then began walking again, their bodies locked tight together.

"You have a perfect build," he said.

"So do you."

"But my ribs stick out."

"I like you that way."

"You know," he said, "we ought to be careful. If we keep talking like this we might end up in bed."

"Is that what you want?"

"I don't know."

"I don't know either," Rebecca said. "But you have to see that we don't."

"No," he said, "you're the girl. You have to draw the line."

She started to laugh, but the earnestness in his face stopped her. He really believes, she thought, that girls are elusive creatures, born to be pursued, with a passion to be hunted as keen as the hunter's. How little he knows, how little any men seem to know. She looked at him and two fireflies illuminated an inch of the twilight between their faces, and she thought: A girl is only self-possessed that way until someone gets to her and the madness enters into her and then the moral considerations, the preconceived notions, the agonizing second thoughts become ashes in the fire of her lust. A girl, once the madness is in her, is not a machine to say, Now we do it, now we don't.

She said, "Don't depend on me, Julian. Not for that. I'm pretty passionate."

They stopped high on Windmill Road, high enough to see the remaining colors in the west, and looked at the houselights burning in the valley, mellow in the summer haze. An oriole called out sweetly somewhere in the maples and elms and oaks all around them. A car sped west along Oakmont Ridge, down into the flaming end of summer light. The long, gentle hills and the distant lights filled Rebecca with a mood of such tenderness that she thought she would cry. She and Julian turned toward each other at the same

instant and explored each other in another wonderfully erotic kiss. Then they moved slowly along, holding hands. Rebecca closed her eyes and when she opened them night had suddenly shut down.

She wrote that night: "I am a girl who looks forward to everything, every fresh event will mold a better Rebecca, all that happens is an education. But at that one moment on the way home, moving in his rhythm, stride for his stride, my longing was deep for that present to be all of the future, to permeate all of the past — to never end but to go on proliferating in a natural way, like clusters of corals in the sea. Time without end. For ever and ever. I would give my soul for it."

✠ ✠ 7 ✠ ✠

And a few nights later Rebecca wrote: "Mother has a standard reaction to my problems which is, Come off it now. Quit being a tragic figure. She polices me constantly to see if I act in the interests of a wicked and unholy egotism. And I usually do. But now this time, this one time in my life, I know that she would understand — understanding, by my definition, meaning suffer with me, see the beauty with me. But not Father. He would make it a moral drama. Julian the cad, the Lovelace, darkening our door. Me the lovely white angel. And emblazoned on his mind would be words like rape. But Mother — well, yes, she is prosaic. But she is drawn helplessly to beauty as long as there is honor in it, and style, which I suppose is the only kind of beauty; and I sense that deep down in her she is the family radical — the one of us with the unfathomable joy for life, the goy poet (but isn't it

possible, as Father once said, that all great poets are goy?) who must follow her lights wherever they may lead. . . ."

She wrote the words, and thought the sordid thoughts, but she was numb and could not feel. She felt crushed by betrayal; she grew more certain that the nature of man is fickle, and that what happened between her and Julian struck him finally as commonplace. But there had been nothing commonplace (there just *hadn't*) in the powerful and compact emotion of their coming together, their tangled bodies doing something else that did not have to be learned. It was afterward, when he managed once again to hide behind the barrier of his own flesh; then he could forget that Rebecca was the first naked woman in his life, the first to give herself to him; then he could remember that he lived to play chess, and weigh her against the profession in an atmosphere of calculated gloom. And find her wanting. He could forget the sight of her, standing in the living room wearing nothing but a string of her mother's pearls. His pure enthusiasm was obviously not so pure after all, and though his member which had so disappointed her on the beach no longer did last night, in fact was incised in her memory, branded there, like a poem by Keats — she felt that it must have been an independent concupiscence. The tool of man. Always at the ready, while the mind darkens and the heart remains cold.

Slowly she circled in on the pain, and she remembered what she had said to him earlier in the week as they walked home from the Sound: "Don't depend on me, Julian. Not for that. I'm pretty passionate." She hated herself for the seraphic look she must have had on her face when she said that, but it was true all the same — she couldn't help herself. It was up to Julian to help her, and she suspected now that he could have, too, because what, after all, did he say in her ear after it happened?

This: "It's exactly like when you win a tough game. The same feeling flows through you. A tremendous sense of power!" Just seconds beyond the first time for both of them and his mind had gone that far away, and his words were like hammer blows grinding her bones and cartilage to powder.

And this: "When I become World Champion I will make a tour of the whole world, giving exhibitions. My prices will be unprecedented in chess. People will pay thousands to see me — in Tokyo, Berlin, Moscow, Paris, London, Rome. I will set new economic standards. I will travel in jets and wear the finest tailored suits and have special chessmen made of solid silver and gold. Everything the best, the very best. Down to the manicure. The trim. Everything.

"I will build a house in New Mexico, out near the painted desert — and I will write three books on chess. Opening game, middle game, end game. They will be definitive. Then I will turn the game upside

down. I will organize my own club, the Julian Prim Chess Club. Class, prestige — the atmosphere of the Metropolitan, the Union, that kind of club. Tournaments in tuxedoes. No loudmouthed little brats in there. No chess bums. You must wear a tie. No one under eighteen, unless they get special permission or they've proved themselves."

And all the time he could not have been less moist from her body than she was from his. Rebecca tried to say, "Forget about power. What does power have to do with us? Stop all this talk. A smooth tongue is a fresser — it gobbles up the truth. The only thing that matters is, do I exist for you? Is there something in me half so real and radiant as the clothes, the chess club, the hideaway in the painted desert? She tried to say, as the life drained out of her heart, that she wanted to be promiscuous with him, she wanted to grow up with him and become carefree in his arms —- she yearned that they would be a source of enormous pleasure to each other. She tried to say, Achieve everything you want, but want me most of all. But she looked up from his legs, over all the hues of his body, up to the faint gold and even lavender in the hollows of his neck and around his eyes, and she struck up a smile and said, "That sounds very exciting, Julian. Tell me more."

"I have a vision of my club," he said. "It will have a cocktail lounge, a fine mahogany bar where ladies and gentlemen can drink good liquor at high prices — all

the time talking chess. Top international tournaments will be held in my club, with big cash prizes. I will have gambling rooms — cards, dice, cribbage, *chemin de fer* — with a cut off the top for me. And the millionaires. I will drive them out of chess unless they kick in a lot of money. Not nickels and dimes, but money. There will be no patrons in my club, only pigeons. Rich pigeons. Willing pigeons. Gentlemen who will bet a hundred bucks on a properly handicapped game, or take a club table for bridge at ten cents a point. Who needs patrons? I'm going to get rid of them. The real money is in pigeons, and when they lose there's no crying, no demands, nothing. They just come back for more — like that Bryan Pleasant character."

"You get rid of what you don't like."

"I try to," he said.

"I guess that's good."

"Well, you have to survive."

His breath was hot and exciting on Rebecca's face and she tried with her eyes, with the awful knot of growing grief in her, to turn his mind to her scent and her desire, to soften his eyes, to make him acknowledge the flame he'd felt and given her — a flame like gorgeous wine. But there was no way to ask, no point in pleading. Her throat was stiff and it ached. His hand touched her upper arm and held there for just an instant, the way a robin might light in a tree in the evening, just pausing before passing on, and it took

something close to courage to say, "My parents will be back soon. We'd better get dressed."

"No." She could smell what must be his seed on his breath, and maybe something of her, and suddenly her spirits were driven even lower, and her skin shriveled with the cold knowledge that she had performed in a way that would be meaningless if he did not love her. Meaningless in every way. Despair rushed through her blood, formed a dizzying void in her stomach and left her weak. "Not yet," said Julian. He thrust his pelvis at her — there was a possessive quality in his movement, and ownership in the way he kneaded her upper thigh and leaned in on her; it was not unlike an assault. "The movie won't be over for a while."

Rebecca fell against his chest and let the tears run down her face. His heart thumped slowly and with a forceful beat, and she had an image of parting his ribs like the ropes of a boxing ring and crawling inside, into his warmth and darkness, to remain there forever. She listened intently to his heart as if it tapped out a message of hope in a private code, and she cried so hard that her shoulders shook.

And then he stroked her back and said, "Okay, okay, take it easy," over and over, and when she stopped shaking he said, "Can you imagine what a subway is like when you're a child and you travel alone and everyone is taller than you? You get all the smells and no air. The old people, they stare at you

with their mouths hanging open and their eyes running, or else flat, no interest in you, no friendliness. And sometimes at rush hour in the summer — I remember this from grammar school — there you are, soaked with sweat and trying to get your breath, people breathing on you and jabbing and sometimes your arms are locked at your sides and hands roam around on you . . . sometimes you jab back. Once I elbowed an old lady in the breast and all the color drained out of her face. Then in the winter that certain underground cold that gets in your bones when you stand on the platform waiting for the train to come. . . ."

As he talked Rebecca took his head in her naked lap and stroked his silken hair. She wanted to rub softly, deeply into his brain the shape of her world with all of its possessions of lightness and love, and rub into it with the honesty of her hand the beauty they could have — lasting beauty. Forever, forever, forever.

"The subway taught me about ugliness and hate," he said, "and what people do in the dark. When I was still a little boy I knew all the smells and shapes and accents of the losers. I remember once on a New Lots train — I was visiting an aunt. I was deep in a chess problem and I didn't even realize this man had sat down next to me. You know, kids have strange reasoning powers. I mean here I was, already getting to be a good chess player, I was twelve I guess, thirteen,

but it never struck me why a man would sit next to me on a subway in the evening. It just seemed natural — I mean even though there were a lot of empty seats. He said he liked chess and wanted to play me a game. Every time he made a move he rubbed his hand across my lap: He was no chess player. He wore a tan cord suit and I noticed a dark spot growing at his crotch, and across the aisle from us I saw this Negro girl trying not to look at us. I remember she kept drawing her lips in the way so many Negroes do, making the thickness disappear. He made a lot of completely stupid moves and I mated him quickly, then he smiled at me and reached over and unzipped my fly. He wore a bowler hat. He had a mustache, and he smelled of liquor and bay rum. He was a gentleman, I remember thinking that about him, and he had a clipped speech I wasn't used to, almost English. It was probably Ivy League. I didn't do anything until we got to the next station, and then just before the doors closed I jumped out onto the platform, leaving him and the Negro girl and maybe one or two others staring at me through the windows. I didn't feel anything. I only remember thinking that if I was dressed like him I wouldn't be riding on a subway.

"The thing is, I'm talking about the subway and darkness and hatred. I'm talking about needing to win out, no tin cans tied to your tail — get out of the

dark! Oh hell, I don't even know what I want to say!" Julian smiled and it almost seemed to hurt his face, but he suddenly looked young and sweet. Rebecca touched his mouth and he shook his head and frowned.

"It's not the subway," he went on, "or that man, or any one thing. I'm not talking about the subway. I don't really know what I'm saying. But one person travels faster than two, one can almost fly — and I need to fly — and yet . . . You know, in a strange way I like the subway, and sometimes I enjoy deliberately not hating someone who walks on my feet and blows bad breath at me and then gives me the knee or the elbow, then stares straight through me when I look at him. You know? I just thought of a crazy thing. A lot of times when I'm way ahead in a game, when I've got a laugher going and my opponent's struggling to say 'resign' and he sits there sweating it out and the time is running on his clock — you know what I see? What enters my mind? This is really crazy. The man with the bowler hat. . . ."

"Julian," Rebecca said.

"Yeah."

"Do you care for me at all?"

"Let's not talk about it now," he said.

"But we just made love."

"I wouldn't put it that way."

"You wouldn't? How would you put it then?"

"We had intercourse. We copulated. Screwed. Whatever you call it. I know that, you know that. The rest gets confusing."

"Julian, I feel sick!"

"The aftermath," he said. "You feel the aftermath. People get gloomy after sex. Don't you know that?"

"I never heard it."

"I do, a little, myself," he said.

"I mean sick in my heart, Julian. I mean —"

"Get dressed. We'll both get dressed."

They showered and put on their clothes and filled the dark house full of light. Then they drank iced tea in the kitchen. They sat across from each other and Rebecca stared hard into Julian's eyes, trying to pass through the barrier of their blue façade, as he said, "The Rolls Royce is still king of the cars, and I'm going to buy one. Purchase one. Custom-made — a bar, TV, bed in the back, artillery, the works. On the hood a king and queen made of ebony and gold — the white queen, the black king. Maybe I'll buy a yacht too, and a jet. I'll throw grand parties — maybe out there in the Sound on summer nights, with actors and socialites and industrialists mixing with chess masters — you know? And I will become one of the ten best-dressed men in America. I have the build for it. Thin. You have to be thin."

"Do you really want those things?"

"I want them," he said. "Sure. Why not? People never look very deep at you. What you have — what

you are — better be there, right there on the surface. People judge by what they can see. I will make them see all right."

"But show is all you're talking about," Rebecca said. "You're more than that. There are deep things in you, Julian, hidden things. People who love you will look beyond the surface."

He waved her words away. "For you it's all different. Let's say you've got yours. You have all this out here, and your parents and friends. Me — I'm on my own. On display. I have to be like those precision instruments that have those stickers when they're packed — 'Made with Skill.' 'Packed with Care.' When you're on your own you can move fast — just say, 'Let's go.' And I plan to move out of the East, out to where people don't talk to themselves on the streets. What they do in the dark is fine. I don't want to see it, I don't want to know. Maybe I will build my house in the painted desert of New Mexico. Or maybe Honolulu. The weather is warm and I could learn to ride the big waves. I might build in Hong Kong. You can buy all kinds of great threads there, and cheap. Or maybe I will build in Malibu, where I can see the setting sun and all that endless water running west — away from New York — and as I watch the sun I will know that back here everything lies in darkness. . . ."

Rebecca reached across the table and put her hand in his. He squeezed it briefly, his distraught eyes

glancing off hers for an instant, then dropped her hand on the cold enamel.

"Look at me, Julian."

"Why?"

"Look at me," she demanded.

"No."

"Please look into my eyes."

"All right, I'm looking. Your eyes are hazel. What do you want me to see?"

"I love you, Julian."

"No," he said. "You don't love me. We feel an attraction to each other. A physical attraction. We're not the first ones it ever happened to, you know. Sometimes I get that same feeling when I have a good game going — tight and tense and the outcome in doubt. . . . A kind of warmth running through my blood."

"Is that all?" Rebecca said. "Is that all you feel?"

"We used each other to find out something — to do something we needed to do," he said. "It happens every day."

"No! No! You're so horribly wrong, Julian!" Rebecca slipped onto her knees and wound her arms around his legs and put her head in his lap.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "You mustn't back away, just now — just when we can have everything."

Julian jumped to his feet, and she felt the pain as he tipped the table into her ribs. "You're trying to trap me," he said.

"Don't *look* at me that way," Rebecca said. "Last night — just an hour ago — these past weeks. . . . You cared. I *know* you felt what I felt." She struggled to her feet and reached her hand out, but he winced and backed away.

"I feel nothing," he said. "Nothing."

"All right then, you'd better leave here. You'd better go away."

"I will," he said.

"There's only one way I can act, Julian, and that's to give of myself — give myself completely to the people I love. My father and mother are that kind of people. I guess you catch the disease." The tears had stopped and Rebecca rubbed her eyes. "I can't hold anything back, anything I feel — it isn't in my nature. All I can do is love. I've seen it grow in me these last few weeks, and if you don't want me, if you feel nothing, then you'd better leave. Leave. Leave now, Julian. . . . Get out of this kitchen and take my love with you to your modern house out in the painted hills."

"Oh, no," he said, backing away, an uncertain expression on his face. "Not modern. Where did you get that idea? The whole thing came to me that day we went up in the Statue of Liberty, but I think I've known it for years. I am going to hire the most famous architect in the world to build my house. He will build it in the shape of a rook. . . ."

Julian waited for her to say something but she

could only stare into his eyes as he reclined with false ease, hands in pockets, against the kitchen door.

"It will be an ancient castle," he went on. "Medieval. With a moat, spiral staircases, parapets, everything. I see it in my mind. Every detail is clear." He moved his hands up to his face in parallel lines describing a majestic column, and in his eyes was a turmoil blue as thunder.

"I want to live the rest of my life in a house shaped exactly like a rook."

Rebecca had nothing more to say. If she had opened her mouth once more she would have howled like an animal.

A crow dropped down out of the cloudless indigo heights of dusk and lighted. A one-point landing, left foot. He bobbed his head and studied a Ping-Pong ball glowing on the lawn like a white star. Then, walking along examining the ground, he reminded Rebecca of a bookish young man and she almost expected to see grave hands clasped behind his back. After a few pecks in the grass he spread his wings and the wings took the last light of the sun and off he went into the night, and Rebecca was proud of herself for busily observing the world outside her own feelings. The smell that she smelled was cold cream. She had been rubbing it on her eyelids to keep them from drying out and wrinkling (and she guessed that if she cared about her eyelids she cared about

going on). She had been crying so much. But not now. Not any more. The pain from her heart had begun to snake up into her ribs, each separate rib, each one throbbing with a dull ache, and although that probably sounds like a spiritual metaphor it meant that her summer cold had come. She knew that she would not get up tomorrow, or likely for days. And feeling like a Pollyanna, she told herself that pneumonia, if it came, was still much better than suicide.

Now her mind turned to yesterday when she was on the beach with Rita, when she was deep in her firmament of sorrow and every few minutes tears would start up and splash down her face and Rita would elaborately not notice and she did not dare go in the water for fear she would sink to the bottom like a rock. She could hear Rita telling her all the summer gossip, who was dating whom, what girl went out with what boy and got in all that terrible mess in a bar across the line in New York State, in Vista, and Rita told her about the Dowling brothers, Tommy and Paul, Tommy a junior at Williams and Paul out of Loomis and starting Yale next month, and how handsome they were, and oh wait until you meet them, they may be at the beach today, I am dying for you to meet them, they are going to make the rest of the summer really swing! and Rebecca was surprised to be listening to Rita to whom she never really listened, to all of her gossip which seemed to

emanate from her as naturally as the sweet scent from her skin, surprised because she had not talked to her since Julian came and almost thought she never would again, but she listened now, she listened — and with her eyes pressed shut she saw the boy as he walked toward her yesterday, and wondered if she looked stricken and bereaved to him, and she saw that he had a handsome nose, dark-brown cheeks, thin and seamed, tight trunks, long legs and streams of golden hair cascading down his face, a kind of Jean-Paul Belmondo look to him — and this is Tommy, Becky; Becky, this is Tommy, his family just moved here from Grosse Point, isn't that wonderful? and now with her eyes closed Rebecca saw Tommy and she saw Julian and she remembered that Tommy was going to call and she told herself that she did not care, and now it was a tossup — did she begin to laugh at herself or did she continue to cry for herself? She was taking sick. She had chills. Her cheeks were in flames. I will be in bed for a week, she told herself. Tommy can wait, life can wait. . . . *Just don't think about boys any more.*

Yes, she thought. Fat chance.

✠ ✠ 8 ✠ ✠

As I lie here on pale sand, caressed by the Caribbean sun that sails slowly down toward an emerald sea, I know that once again I have left chess behind me — this time with no ghastly stir of regrets. This time forever. I finished my story on Julian Prim by late August; *Outlook* ran it in the October issue. Most of the fall I worked out of our Paris office, covering, for a welcome change, the frothy world of society, fashion and the arts, and for hours each day I would stroll around my favorite city staring up at her feudal silhouettes against her gray European sky, and thank God that I had "come home."

One brilliant autumn day, drunk with the sun coming out from behind blue and pewter clouds, I walked along the Rue Mouffetard, carrying the chess set I had bought that summer. I sold it to a pawnbroker for eleven francs. Later, sitting in the Luxem-

bourg Gardens eating peanuts and trying to understand why I had carted the set across the Atlantic, I only knew that I was well rid of it; the relief was keen and devout as though I had burned the letters of an old flame.

On Christmas Day I flew home, and immediately brought my family down to this little island for the holidays. Right now, from inland somewhere, I can hear a gay fragment of native music that tinkles and laughs and mocks along the sand and dies in the sound of the surf. This is not yet a tourist island, it is not yet a vending machine — the children are glad-eyed and beautiful — and perhaps I need no other reasons to be at work on a novel. As I write these words, Timothy is playing in the waves of this warm ocean. My other son, Matthew, is sailing with a lovely girl he met at a dance the evening we arrived. My wife, busy in her arena of shade under a beach umbrella, leafs through *Commentary* and sips a glass of iced vermouth. Rebecca is somewhere.

Through all the years of our marriage, through the many moods of those years, I have confided in Jane. We are both forty-one years old and our love, as far as I can tell, has endured the stresses of time; I believe it is true to say that trouble has only drawn us closer together. Still, I know something today that I did not learn until this summer, when I saw my dream of a perfect union for what it was — a dream. As hard as I tried, as much as I wanted to, I could not confide

in Jane all that I learned about Rebecca — her womanhood, the golden air of her belief in life, her abilities, her style, her mind. And all that I learned about myself from her and from Julian Prim also stayed trapped inside of me. My information and my understanding had been taken from my daughter without her knowledge, and so she and Julian together belonged to me and I could not share them with anyone. It took twenty-two years of marriage for me to happen on the art of conscious secrecy, and what this will mean to my marriage I do not know, but I suspect that it will mean nothing — for I will try never to pry again where I should not pry.

The story of Julian Prim and Rebecca is not finished, it seems. Yesterday — her twenty-first birthday — she received a small package from New York. She opened it in the hotel and came skipping down to the beach in her black bathing suit, wearing a string of pink pearls. They have long noons on these hot calm islands and she had to shout us out of our lethargy; when I saw the pearls I remembered the other ones — her mother's, the circumstances of her wearing them — and my head felt light and my heart pounded with all the recklessness of youth.

Steel-band music caroled us that night on the balmy evening air in celebration of Rebecca's birthday — "her majority," as she insisted. We drank a good rum punch, smooth and dark, and I drank a lot of it as one will do in this climate. We drank and we

sang to the music, sitting on the veranda under a long white track of stars. Much later, I kissed Rebecca good night at her door, and with her arms resting on my shoulders she whispered in my ear, "Julian Prim is coming down, Father. He wants to see me. Isn't that the strangest thing?"

"Well, he gave you a string of pearls."

"You're not upset, are you?"

"Of course not."

"We saw quite a bit of each other at home."

"I gather."

"Well — what do you think?"

"I don't know, Becky. What do *you* think?"

"It's hard to say. It could be marvelous. I have to wait and see."

I kissed her forehead. "I love you, you know," I said.

"I know. . . ." She looked into my eyes. "I know you do."

In bed that night I said to Jane, "Julian Prim sends pearls and now he's coming down here. What do you feel about it?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I'll let her do the feeling for herself now. She matured a good deal this summer."

I sat up and stared at my wife. "What do you mean, 'matured'?"

"I mean she matured."

"But how do you know that? Do you mean physi-

cally or what? But obviously you don't mean physically, Jane. You mean — you mean she's a woman."

"I mean just what I said," Jane answered. "And don't ask a lot of silly questions. I'm tired, and you had too much to drink tonight. You want to quarrel."

"But she's my daughter," I said. "What about this summer? I hope you're not keeping something from me — something about her and Julian. . . ."

"I'm keeping nothing from you," Jane said. She looked at me, and smiled at me, and suddenly I knew that she was lying. I turned off the light and lay back in the dark, and felt like a wounded animal — something big and helpless and fast growing extinct. I wondered how much Rebecca had told her mother and I knew that I had better not wonder very hard because I would never find out.

So now we wait for Julian Prim. I sit on the beach breathing the warm salt air that enfolds each day and I watch the awkward island schooner tied up in the harbor with her bright sails furled, and I walk slowly through the town, smelling the sea and the overripe fruit. I look at the young girls in their gaily colored dresses who ripen fast like the fruit down here. I listen to the musical chimes of voices as they bargain gently over bananas and baskets of large brown roots, and I stroll past the houses with their plaster façades and their pastel colors faded to a touching dimness — and I take it all in and yet I don't, because Julian Prim is coming. I remember those ten sultry August

days when, aware of the diary but not yet having read it, I lived on the tender nerve of suspicion, and I realize with some surprise that I had never once ceased thinking about them.

"How do you analyze what happened?" a *Life* reporter said to Julian Prim. "No one expected you to lose a practice game — and to James Haight!" He smiled. "But then, those things happen."

"I played a backward, penny-pinching game," Julian said. "But I'm not concerned about it."

"What do you think of Haight's chances?"

"He will be in the cellar," Julian said.

"Where do you expect to finish?"

"In first place."

"And yet you lost to Haight. . . ."

Julian Prim turned away to answer a question put by *Chess Review.*

"Yes, Haight is a drawish player. He lacks the talent for this tournament. You have to be out there to prove more than your equality. The point is to win."

Then to *Chess Monthly:* "Here is the way I see it. Berlin's problem is sterility. He has not had an opening idea in ten years. . . . He makes the rest of us impatient and we blunder — usually in the end game. I am not impatient. Haight I've mentioned. Mark Friedman is, of course, very steady, very hard to beat. My last ten games with him, he has eight draws and I

have two wins. The Sturdivant brothers are okay — Richard is better except when he plays Peter, but he has a way of folding when things get complicated. Peter doesn't study enough any more, although he has great natural talent. They were both terrible against the Russians last year. Boris Elman is supposed to be in bad health. His game is erratic — good one time, ridiculous the next. You have to watch him, though. He comes up with clever ways to handle old opening lines. You could call him a classic player. Jason Cook is steady, he fights hard. Too cautious, though. Caution can kill you. This Ramon Gomez, I have never played him but he has a reputation of being romantic. That kind of thing is all right if you're Tahl or me. My attitude is, I like to see players make sacrifices. They have a hard time getting the material back. Let's see — that leaves Alan Pollenz. His chess has been weak lately. He takes a lot of time on the clock, and he doesn't see things very well right now. I put him down there with Haight."

Then for no apparent reason Julian pointed a finger at the man from *Time* and said, "Get out. . . ." The man stood his ground, trying to stare Julian down. "Get out of here," Julian said again, and when he did not move, Julian shouted, "I discussed you with the director and you are barred from the tournament. I mean it. Get out!"

Later, the men from *Life* and *Chess Review* explained to me the background of that incident.

"Last night," said Hatherly of *Life*, "just after you left, Prim came back to check some detail, about having the time clock on his left — you know how he is about those things. Before he could leave, Dresser cornered him and got him in a conversation. Dresser's like an analyst. You look at those black, heavy-lidded eyes and you start picking holes in your childhood."

"I talked to Dresser this morning," said Berman of *Chess Review*. "According to him, he said to Prim, 'We hear you've had a bout with romance.' Prim asked him how he knew and Dresser said he couldn't reveal his sources. 'So who is the lucky girl?' Dresser asked him. Prim wouldn't tell him that, but he did say she's a beautiful girl. He actually went into a long, poetic description. Can you imagine that? 'Well,' Dresser said, 'how do you like romance — girls — the whole schmeer?' and Prim said, 'Romance? It's just a lot of jumping up and down. It can't compare with chess. . . .'"

Hatherly and Berman laughed, and I forced myself to join them. "The trouble started," said Hatherly, "when Dresser asked to use the interview in his piece. Prim said no, definitely not, it was off the record. They almost came to blows at that point. Dresser claims he just went crazy. Flipped."

"That Dresser is a snake," said Berman. "You have to admire him, though."

"Prim, the lover," Hatherly said. "Doesn't that kill you?"

"I'll bet he's a virgin," Berman said. "Saves it all for chess."

"It's amazing how much time we spend talking about him," I said. "He's the subject of every conversation."

"Charisma," Hatherly said. "Charisma, pure and simple. Prim has the personality of a superstar. That's the story slant I'm using." He looked at me with wolfish eyes and leaned toward me confidentially. "What's yours?"

At seven-thirty that evening a leading patron of the tournament spoke: "Ladies and gentlemen, this most important event, the United States Chess Championship, brings together in competition ten of the best players currently active, either here or abroad. One among them could, sometime in the near future, bring the World Championship to us from across the ocean.

"Their strength reflects the growing interest in chess in this country. More and more people are joining clubs. More and more subscribe to chess magazines. Gathered here this evening to watch the opening round there are five hundred of you, while just ten years ago only a handful of ardent followers attended any given round.

"With your permission, I would like to introduce the contenders in alphabetical order.

"International Grandmaster, Eugene Berlin, the defending United States Champion.

"Senior Master, Jason Cook.

"Master, Boris Elman.

"Grandmaster, Mark Friedman.

"Senior Masters, Ramon Gomez and James Haight.

"Master, Alan Pollenz.

"Grandmasters, Julian Prim, and Peter and Richard Sturdivant.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I understand that the winner of this tournament will qualify automatically to play in the Buenos Aires Interzonal next April.

"Now I will turn you over to the Tournament Director."

While the formalities droned on, the players paced back and forth on the raised platform, threading their way among the five tables, talking to one another, laughing, glancing out at the audience; and I noticed that Julian and Berlin always managed to be at opposite ends of the platform. Above and beyond the tables vast sheets of cloth with squares of blue and gray were pinned against the rear wall. The five scorers — one for each wallboard — were boys in their teens, chess players, contemporaries of Julian Prim. But where they were casually dressed in sweaters and levis and T-shirts, Julian wore a black suit, a blue shirt and a white tie, and he seemed of another generation.

The pieces which the scorers used to mark development of play were red and white and fitted into the slit pockets in the cloth. Julian grinned at one of the scorers he knew, young Levy from Riverdale High

School, whom he found obnoxious, and, while the other players continued to move around the platform, Julian sat down at his table and studied the white pieces, his cheek crushed into his bent left wrist, his mouth slightly open, his eyes squinting with concentration — the pose I had convinced *Outlook* we should use on our cover. Berlin broke off a conversation to stare pensively at Julian's back.

Roland Parks, the Tournament Director, extolled the virtues of chess in sentences that pitched and rolled and never quite settled to a natural end; and I watched Mark Friedman promenade up and down the platform with his hands clasped behind his back, his long hair fluttering like a silver pennant from his head, and a smile and a nod for everyone. Stopping in front of Julian for a moment, he leaned forward in a small, courtly bow. Julian looked up into the old man's eyes with a slow wink. Mark Friedman, who in his best days had fought against Alekhine and Capablanca and Marshall and Fine, winked in return and then walked on.

Now Alan Pollenz leaned his elbow on Julian's table and whispered into his ear. Julian, frowning, refused to look at him. A flashbulb went off in a white burst and Julian jumped to his feet. "Get those vultures out of here!" he shouted to Roland Parks, interrupting his speech. "No more pictures until after the game. Get them out of here or I don't play!"

The cameramen were shunted off to the rear of the

large humid ballroom — and now it was eight o'clock, time to start the clocks, time for the tournament to begin.

Julian had drawn white for five of the nine games, a small but definite break in his favor, and, in his first game, he was white against Jason Cook, one of the tournament's weaker players. "He does not follow the truth of the board," Julian had told me. "If a wild move is called for and Cook can't see the results clearly, he plays it safe. You have to play what is there in a given position. I call that truth. You have to gamble sometimes, take the plunge, because if you don't you will never be great, or even really good. Give Cook two moves and he will choose the safe one. Give him a mate in four or a defense against a mate in six, and he will defend against the mate."

A hush fell slowly over the ballroom; the players were seated, the clocks were started — the large lights above the platform glowed in a governing yellow silence. Julian Prim spent only seconds on his opening moves, while Cook pondered each move, including his opening P-QB4 on which (in my opinion) he wasted more than five minutes. I studied the wallboard and played the moves on my pocket set. The game, a Sicilian, developed along conventional lines for the first ten moves. As soon as Julian made each move he would level his gaze at Jason Cook as though trying to hypnotize him; finally Cook bridged his left

hand across his eyes. Julian then jumped up from his chair and walked around — his thumbs in his belt, his suit coat bunched up around his waist — to watch progress at the other tables. On his ninth and tenth moves he did not even bother to sit down, but stood over his game, glanced at the pieces an instant, made his move and rushed away after trying, unsuccessfully, to catch Cook's eye.

By United States Championship rules, two and a half hours were allotted to each player in which to make forty moves. Julian played faster tournament chess than any other modern master — he seldom needed more than an hour for the most complex game — and at the end of ten moves in his game with Cook, Julian had used up only four minutes on his clock; his opponent had taken half an hour.

Julian castled on his eleventh move, which brought forth a few groans from the spectators. While Jason Cook puzzled over his next move I looked at the position; it seemed clear to me that Julian should have played P-KB4 in order to anticipate Black's ensuing drive to exchange king rook pawns. I leaned over and asked Paul Marcus his opinion.

"Not a very interesting game so far," he said. "Not a typical Julian game. But I think he can win it. His position is all right."

Julian did win, although he seemed in some trouble until Jason Cook's thirty-ninth move, which, with

time pressure building, proved to be a definite blunder. It was after midnight when Julian and I stopped in a Times Square restaurant for tea.

"How do you feel?" I said.

"I feel like hell."

"That was a tough game."

"Not so tough. I fooled around a little at first, but I had him all the way." Julian stirred sugar into his tea. "I suppose I should eat something. I wish I felt like eating."

"When did you eat last?"

"I don't know. Around noon."

"You should really try to eat," I said. "You look thin."

"I don't care." He hesitated and then said, "You know — chess is always something I can depend on. I always like to play. But tonight I didn't even feel like playing. I even wonder how much I want to win this tournament." He looked out the window at the lighted, hectic evening. "I never wondered that before." His expression was puzzled, almost hurt.

"You want to win," I said. "You just need some food."

"Food," he said. "Sure."

We sat in silence and then Julian said, "Do you know that every player in this tournament is married? Some of them are very young, too. Pollenz is only twenty, twenty-one. So is Gomez. I don't know. My feeling is, you should not marry until you've done all

you can do — until you're so old you can't do anything any more. And then the thing to do is marry a young girl, many years younger than you — someone good to look at and well brought up, and she can take care of you. . . . My feeling is, you marry too early and everything is over — all the things a man looks for in himself, the ideas you have to work out, the struggle to get on top — you end up worrying about bills. A bookkeeper. You worry about your wife's moods."

Julian rubbed his eyes with his fists, and his face, when he next looked at me, was transformed into a tired child's.

"At your age marriage is no concern," I said.

"There is so much ahead of me," he said. "I have a lot of ground to cover, and you move faster alone than with someone else. I'm working my way, step by step, to the top. You have to be free to do that. All by yourself. That's the only way. You have to live with your aim all the time. Live it, breathe it. You need all yourself for that, and what would a woman be but a drag on you?"

"And a man can hate himself," I said, "if he marries before he's ready. He can punish himself with regret."

"Your wife is nice," Julian said. "You were lucky."

"I am lucky."

We drank our tea and then Julian said suddenly, "Listen — what do you think of me, anyway?"

I felt myself blush and I stammered out a well-I-

like-you-very-much, which sounded hollow to my ears.

"People don't like me," Julian said. "I have to work on that."

His confidence overwhelmed me, and there was nothing I could say that would not sound fatuous.

"Becky, you know. She has a good personality. A good mind, too. Not many girls have good minds. You must be proud of her intelligence."

"I'm very proud of her."

"I went off without getting a chance to say good-bye."

"Oh?"

"Tell her that," he said. "Tell her that I looked for her to say good-bye."

"All right, Julian."

"It was good out there," he said. "I like to live in a house. And the air is cool and it smells good. The ocean and the trees, and the silence at night — you can get used to it."

"You can," I said. "I have."

"Well," he said, "I'm pretty tired now. I guess I'll get a subway."

"I'm tired, too," I told him.

We walked outside and it was hotter than in the restaurant. It was after one o'clock in the morning but there was a festive air — Times Square, rowdy and roaring, was jammed with people.

"Well," said Julian at the subway entrance, "what did you think of my game tonight?"

"It wasn't one of your best, was it?"

"I should have lost," he said. "Berlin's game was brilliant. I have to admit it. He played better than I ever remember."

"That's what everyone said. I didn't really follow it."

"You know something?" Julian said.

"What?"

"I'm beginning to feel hungry." And then he turned and walked slowly, stiffly down the stairs into the subway station.

His play improved as the tournament went on. He won his next three games; drew with Boris Elman in a tight Ruy Lopez that was adjourned twice and concluded with Julian offering a draw on the hundred and first move; and won his next two decisively. After seven games he had scored six and a half of a possible seven points, which tied him for second place with Richard Sturdivant. Eugene Berlin, with seven victories, was in first place; his two remaining games were against James Haight, who had scored four draws but had yet to win a game, and Julian.

On Saturday afternoon the temperature soared to a hundred and three degrees, and Julian played his penultimate game with Richard Sturdivant on the

black side of a Giuoco Piano; the game was adjourned after Julian sealed his fortieth move, with the outcome apparently in doubt. James Haight had resigned his game with Berlin in sixteen moves — a game that was completed in less than two hours. There were murmurings of surprise when Richard Sturdivant resigned that evening immediately after he saw Julian's sealed move — Q-Q4. He explained that the succeeding combination would lead to mate in seven.

A large crowd gathered around Julian and Sturdivant as they shook hands. Sturdivant, who spoke with an Ivy League stammer and wore a wrinkled seersucker suit, had a bright, noisy personality and he could not stop talking.

"That was a deep game, Julian. A beauty. You left a few experts around here with egg on their faces."

Julian smiled. "Donadio predicted Q-Q4 would lose for me. And then you resigned."

"Berlin's game was a real laugher."

"I bet he's sound asleep right now," Julian said. "He'll get twelve hours' sleep tonight. He'll need it."

"Good luck tomorrow," Richard Sturdivant said.

"Thanks."

"Win for the youth of America," he said. "Whether they deserve it or not."

Julian had won his must game and now he had seven and a half points to Berlin's eight, and victory against Berlin would bring him the United States Championship. During the night the weather broke,

and on Sunday fierce, blue clouds, mapped dramatically on the face of the sky, opened intermittently in torrents on the city, and by two-thirty in the afternoon the day was very dark.

The last round, like the two before it, was closed to the public; Eugene Berlin had insisted in his agreement with the Foundation that he play his final three rounds in private if the tournament had not been decided. Almost a thousand spectators gathered in the ballroom downstairs and followed the games on a demonstration board where five grandmasters analyzed the play.

The room on the fifth floor of the hotel was airless; the tables constructed on wide circular iron stands were set against the wall beneath candy-striped draperies, and the gray carpet was spotted with cigarette burns. When Julian noticed that his table wobbled, play was held up for ten minutes while a small scarred card table was brought up from the hotel's basement. Julian then asked that a container of iced tea with two teaspoons of sugar be brought to him every half hour.

As he stood waiting for the pieces to be set up on the card table, Alan Pollenz approached him and said, "I see that Sturdivant contrived to blow his game with you. . . ." Berlin, who was resting on a couch against the other wall, opened his eyes and smiled, nodding in agreement.

Julian did not answer. His motionless and expres-

sionless gaze was fixed on the table, and he seemed in a state of stupefaction. But then, as he sat down in his seat, he leaned across the table and said to Berlin softly, "I saw you smile. I saw you smile at what Pollenz said. . . ." Suddenly his face, every muscle in it, was quivering with nervous excitement; his eyes, which had seemed dull before, almost bemused, gleamed now with full, vivid fire, and in an even softer voice he said, "Well, Master — here we are. We are supposed to shake hands. It's the way things are done. Have you forgotten?"

They shook hands across the table and their eyes locked until Berlin, with an embarrassed clearing of his throat, looked away. While the Tournament Director set their clocks, Julian leaned back in his chair, his thumbs hooked in his trouser pockets, and stared at Eugene Berlin, trying to catch him in the web of his own intensity. But Berlin busied himself lighting a cigarette, then wiped his glasses carefully on a clean white handkerchief. He did not look at Julian once in the next four hours.

Some of the players still walked around the room as they waited for play to begin. When they stopped in front of Julian's table they looked at him with an expression that combined dislike and a kind of frightened reverence; they all paused there, waiting, as though he might look up and acknowledge them, acknowledge something in them they were not sure

they possessed — but he never noticed them, and they walked on.

Now a new depth of quietness filled the room. The nervous, sporadic ripples of sound — the whispered conferences, clicking cameras, coughing, shuffling of feet — abruptly came to an end. The Tournament Director walked up to each table, smiled briefly, and started White's clock. Two and a half hours for forty moves. Two and a half hours for Julian Prim to try and invent a winning design of moves from the possible billions upon billions of variations that a forty-move game can take. Two and a half hours in which he could use his brilliant imagination and his fine perception for spatial relations to become chess champion of the United States.

A photographer hovered in the back of the room waiting for Julian's poised hand to fall. A fly buzzed near Eugene Berlin's nose; he swiped at it impatiently with the fingers of his left hand. The fly floated slowly toward the ceiling. Julian breathed in deeply and let the air seep out in one sustained exhalation — then down came his hand.

1 P—Q4

And a white flash filled the room. As Berlin stared at the move in evident amazement, pursing his cherry lips, Julian, after depressing the button on his clock which automatically started Berlin's, rose from the table.With a jabbing finger he pushed the cameraman

toward the door. "Out, out," he said. "You know enough to obey the rules. You speak English."

"Now you just hold on—"

"*You* hold on," Julian said, pushing the white-faced cameraman out the door with the help of the Tournament Director. "You ruin my concentration."

Jason Cook looked up from his table, grinned, and said, "That will be the day."

Julian slumped down in his chair and closed his eyes. Berlin, stroking his heavy cheeks, still stared at Julian's opening move. Not once as a professional, not once, perhaps, since the childhood game he had played with Jacob Solovey, had Julian opened with the queen's pawn. Five minutes passed and Berlin still stared at the board. By that time the other players had paused by the table (for to them, this was the stage where the drama was) and all of them walked away talking about Julian's opening, discussing what his plan might be. Six minutes, seven minutes. Finally Julian shrugged, got up from the table and went into the bathroom for a drink of water. When he returned Eugene Berlin had responded.

1 P—Q4

As Julian stared at the chessmen his eyes assumed the green, glazed-over quality of profound concentration. His glance flicked quickly across the chessboard, his right hand touched his forehead lightly in the movement of a small cross, and then shot out.

2 N—KB3

Eugene Berlin, frowning at the board, rubbed the tips of his fingers together slowly and then moved.

2 N—KB3

Sighing, he removed his glasses and wiped them again. He did not look away from the board. He used the handkerchief he held in his hand to blow his nose; mucus rattled in his throat. He rolled the handkerchief into a ball and jammed it into his jacket pocket and started massaging his neck with his fingertips. He was never still.

Julian was very still. When he moved a piece, his arm did not seem attached to the rest of him.

3 P—B4 P—K3
4 N—B3 QN—Q2
5 P—K3 B—Q3

Julian squinted his eyes until they were almost shut, ran his tongue slowly across his lips, and then moved.

6 N—QN5

Paul Marcus, sitting beside me, whispered into my ear, "Berlin's last move was poor. Just a plain blunder. He should have played B-K2, in my opinion. I don't know about that knight move of Julian's either."

Neither, apparently, did Berlin, who took ten minutes to decide on what seemed to be an obvious move in his position. After studying his pocket set more carefully, Paul Marcus said, "I think Julian should have played pawn to bishop five. That would have forced the black bishop back, and then he could have

advanced the queen knight's pawn to four. As it is, he's lost time. It could really hurt him."

"I expected a very careful opening from both of them," I said. "Not this. Maybe they're both nervous."

Paul Marcus scratched his head and looked skeptical. "Julian can't have studied the queen openings enough. Chess has specialties like anything else. You specialize in openings."

"Maybe he's depending on the element of surprise."

"When everything rides on one game?" Paul Marcus said. He shook his head. "I don't know. He's a very quixotic boy in some ways — playing to Berlin's strength."

"He likes to gamble," I said.

"The point in chess is to minimize the risk," Paul Marcus said. "I just don't understand him."

"Well," I said, "if he beats Berlin at his own game, then it's a more impressive win. Maybe that's what he's thinking."

"A win is a win," Paul Marcus said. "But it would be like him to think that."

Eugene Berlin made his move.

6	B—K2
7 Q—B2	P—B3
8 N—B3	O—O
9 B—Q3	PxP
10 BxP	P—B4

Paul Marcus put an exclamation point after Berlin's last move, and Julian's game, for the first time, slowed

down. Twice he started to move, but each time he drew his hand back. Finally, he took the pawn.

11	PxP	BxP
12	O—O	P—QN3

After his twelfth move, Berlin had used thirty-five minutes on his clock and Julian fifteen. Paul Marcus and I went out into the hall so that we could talk more easily.

"I think Berlin will keep the championship," he said. "He has an excellent game now. It's too bad, too, because he isn't nearly as interesting a player. Julian will probably try to force things from now on, complicate them. That knight move of his was a real lapse — the kind he doesn't often make. And Berlin is great at making you eat your mistakes. . . ."

Paul Marcus was right. Julian played

13 P—K4

still trying to force the pace. I could only guess, along with Marcus, that Julian was overextending himself in the hope of regaining the initiative.

Berlin took an interminable amount of time before making a reply.

13		B—N2
14	B—KN5	Q—B1
15	Q—K2	B—N5

Peter Sturdivant looked at the game and then said to Paul Marcus, "The fireworks have really started. How about an exclamation point for Berlin's bishop move?"

"Definitely."

"I like Berlin's game," Peter Sturdivant said. "But I never count Prim out. If Berlin drifts just a little Prim will come fighting back."

16 B—Q3 BxN

17 KR—B1

Berlin looked pale now, and there were dark rings of exhaustion beneath his eyes. After long reflection (more than twenty minutes), he picked up his knight with his pudgy hand and captured the pawn at king four.

17 NxP

Julian looked at the move, and then, for a full twenty seconds, at Berlin.

18 BxN

I thought I could see a slight smile start up on Julian's face; he continued to stare at Berlin but the Champion deliberated, rigid and silent, his head bowed to within inches of the chessmen.

Paul Marcus said, "I'm beginning to wonder *who's* winning."

"I think Julian thinks he is."

"I'm sure he does," Paul Marcus said. "He always does. That's part of his secret. He wants to win so much he wills the victory."

"But everyone wants to win," I objected.

"No, I don't agree. A chess player — a master, at least — works hard to win. He prepares. But no one

knows until he plays any given game just how deeply he wants to win that one. Something can go limp inside of you. The creative energy can falter. I have never seen this happen to Julian Prim yet. Not once."

"You make it sound mystical."

"Well, of course it is."

Berlin glanced at his clock and then exchanged bishops.

18		BxB
19	QxB	N—B4
20	Q—K2	B—R4
21	QR—N1	Q—R3

Almost immediately Julian responded with

22 R—B4

which created a glissando of sound — a blend of surprise and excitement — throughout the room. A daub of color burned now on Julian's cheeks. He stared at Berlin for a moment and then got up and walked quickly around the room, pausing at each table to examine the various positions, and when he came back he had to push his way through a number of the players, who, when they were free to leave their own games, gathered around to follow the course of play.

Berlin lighted a cigarette and bowed down over the table, his head bent low. He coughed, pulled back to wipe his mouth with the palm of his hand, then leaned over the pieces again. His forehead gleamed with sweat. Julian, sprawled out in his chair, stared

at the ceiling. Slowly, Berlin's hand moved out, hovered an instant above the chessmen, then descended on the knight.

22 N—R5

Julian sat up straight and rested his elbows on the edge of the table, his head cupped in his hands. After a moment he slumped and rubbed his eyes and then leaned his cheek against his bent left wrist. He looked over at me — or rather, right through me — and then turned his gaze on the board. For fifteen minutes he was perfectly still. A glass shattered on the tiles in the bathroom. A maid came in with a broom and cleaned it up. All through this, Julian stared at the board, not moving. His eyes rested immovably on the board, his lids drooped, and toward the end of the fifteen minutes his mouth opened slightly, which gave him a vaguely bemused look.

Then his hand shot out.

23 B—B6

Mark Friedman walked away from the table, shaking his head and smiling.

"Well," Paul Marcus said, "that is a move. Worth two exclamation points at least. Berlin may be in trouble now. He can't take the bishop with his pawn. If he does, Julian checks with the rook and wins his queen. And the rook pawn can't move, because Julian can sacrifice his queen and mate in three." Paul Marcus smiled. "This move illustrates the difference

between my game and Prim's. I see the move once he makes it, but I can't think it up."

"Berlin is a great defender," I said.

"Yes. He may have an answer."

Now Berlin had only half an hour left on his clock.

23 KR—B1

Julian played without hesitation.

24 Q—K5

Berlin looked at his time clock as his hand hovered over his rook.

24 R—B4

Julian instantly played

25 Q—N3

and Richard Sturdivant, standing beside us, said, "Berlin's knight is gone. Look at that line-up on his queen side — five pieces! No symmetry. He must feel like vomiting!" He laughed and Julian looked up at him sharply. Sturdivant, grinning boyishly, shook his head in apology, and then whispered to Paul Marcus, "We all thought he would fold. He was very nervous last week. All hung up. But you have to admire his guts and the kind of game he plays. Queen pawn opening!"

Berlin's next move was forced.

25 P—N3
26 RxN Q—Q6
27 R—KB1 Q—B4
28 Q—B4

Julian pushed the button on his clock and Berlin's clock started running. He glanced at it — there were fifteen minutes remaining. He removed his glasses and put them on again. A vein throbbed in his temple. He pushed his lower lip out, drew it in, pushed it out again. He lighted a cigarette, put it in an ashtray, and immediately lighted another one. He jutted his chin out of his collar repeatedly, then pushed his lower lip out again. And the minutes ran out.

Julian stared across the table at him, and I thought I saw a softening in his eyes — perhaps an element of pity.

Berlin opened his mouth to speak, and then moved his queen instead.

28 Q—B7

After Julian's prompt reply

29 Q—R6

Berlin cleared his throat a number of times, then slowly rose to his feet.

"I resign," he said. "Congratulations."

"Thanks," Julian said.

They stood a moment looking at each other, then they shook hands briefly, and Berlin turned and walked out of the room.

Downstairs in the ballroom a large crowd waited to congratulate the new United States Champion. Julian clasped a lot of hands, muttered innumerable thank-yous and wore an idiotic grin on his face. "Yes — I will defend next year. . . ." "No, my best

game was against Richard Sturdivant. . . ." "I definitely will go to Buenos Aires. . . ." The Tournament Director threw his arm around Julian and made a very poor pun, and Julian emitted a strained counterfeit of laughter. In his eyes was the look of a trapped animal. "True. I want to take on the Russians. I am very anxious to. They may program their games, but I can beat any machine. . . ."

He showed unusual patience by talking to everyone, by listening to inanities that would ordinarily put him in a cold rage — he struggled to play a part that had suddenly been thrust on him. Julian Prim, it occurred to me, was growing up. Tact was one small sign of it.

And then out in the street he saw Jacob Solovey. The old man was walking slowly away from the hotel through the rain. Julian's hand shot up, his mouth opened, but no sound came. His flushed face went white. He started forward, then stopped. "Why didn't he come up to me?" Julian said. "Why?" And he ran down the street to catch up with him. I hung back, but I was close enough to hear.

"Hello, Professor," Julian said.

"Julian. . . ."

"The queen's pawn," Julian said softly. "I thought you might be glad I could do it."

The old man smiled at the memory, and said, "I am proud of you, Julian. I am very proud."

They stood in the shadows, and the old man

pumped Julian's hand and Julian stood with his head bowed.

"I didn't play my best," he apologized.

"You are the Champion now," Jacob Solovey said. "It was all I wanted. To see this day. It was all I ever wanted."

"Professor," Julian said. He said the word as though his throat hurt, and he looked away. "That letter. . . ."

"No," Jacob Solovey said.

"I had to write it."

"My son," Jacob Solovey said. "It doesn't matter. It was something you had to do." The old man pulled Julian to him in an awkward embrace, and I heard Julian say, "I'm sorry, Professor. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. . . ."

The rest of that night was a disjointed and bizarre celebration; I cannot recall it with any clarity. Julian drank for the first time in his life and it quickly went to his head. He hated the taste of it, yet he seemed anxious to have its oblivious embrace close down on him. We moved through the Village bars, with neon signs swimming drunkenly in pools of light — I remember at one point shouting some terribly sad confession, probably bogus, at a stranger. From bar to bar — and Julian's face grew tight with rage. His overwhelming self-absorption would not go away. He lashed out at

his background, at the American Chess Rules Committee for his sad state of pauperdom, at everyone and everything. Then just as abruptly he relaxed and, grinning like a child, insisted on drinking a rash of toasts — to everyone and everything he had cursed before, with a very special toast (a shot of Scotch) to Eugene Berlin.

Later, I remember a quiet interlude. We stood at the edge of the Hudson River and looked through the rain at the New Jersey shore. A ship came down, pressing forward on the tide, her deck and porthole lights glowing in the overcast. She was going out to sea, and I remember saying to Julian how much tranquillity she seemed to carry with her lights — her gentle misty lights and her nostalgic horns — and that I would like to be going where she was going, and Julian saying suddenly, "Do you realize I did it? I am the Champion! I am the Champion!" and flourishing his arms madly at the night.

And that scene dissolved.

One of us had a brilliant idea: food, a Chinese meal, but nothing came of that, or at least I am fairly certain that nothing came of it; and now we fade in later, much later that night, my brain on fire with gin, and for a moment I feel the sexual powers of my youth and I dream the old dream of fame, and for that moment I seem to breathe the air of an autumn day made sweet and pure by a morning wind, and all is well, all is well.

A strange dialogue echoed in my mind through the night:

"I happen to be a very good friend of Roland Parks'. Next week he will award me a trophy. He will hand me a check. He told me an elephant joke tonight. He — "

"I don't care," the man said. "I am not Roland Parks and I don't know Roland Parks from — "

"Drive them away, Floyd," said a woman's voice.

"Are we at 119 West 13th Street?" asked Julian in tones that sounded far away.

"Drive them away," said the voice of doom, "and shut the door. At three, for Christ's sake, in the morning!"

Fade in again, and I find myself lurching down a cold corridor in the borough of Queens, half carrying Julian, both of us drenched to the skin. Outside a window the sky is black and the wind strums melancholy songs in the trees. I smell burning rubber.

"I am the drunkest man in the world and you are the drunkest boy. But I am the drunkest of all."

"Shhh!"

Then the tent of blackness folds over me once more — and next we are down on our knees beside his bed, two Jews, or a Jew and a half, our elbows resting on the mattress, our hands forming temples at our chins, an attitude I sense vaguely as ridiculous, and Julian is saying, "And I would kneel right like this and I

would ask God to let me win. I talked to Him about it. I kept it up until I was thirteen. . . ."

"What shall we pray about now that we're here?"

"I don't know. Do you know how?"

"No."

"I don't either any more."

I dimly hear a voice call out, "Julie, Julie — is that you, darling? Are you all right?"

"Am I all right. Am I all right," Julian whispers, then he screams, "Of course I'm all right. Go back to sleep!" And I watch myself listening to him saying, ". . . He doesn't even know about the tournament. He never reads a paper and I never tell him anything. It upsets him too much. His mind is nearly gone. He is a janitor in a school near here. He used to be an alcoholic, but he hasn't touched a drop for three years. I threatened to throw him out. He used to lie about his drinking, but I go around saying he's a lawyer, so am I any better? He cries himself to sleep at night. He has bad dreams like a child and tries to crawl in bed with me."

Illness began to move and shudder inside of me, and all was a haze until Julian raised his arms toward the ceiling and cried, "Nothing will ever stop me now. Nothing can ever stop me, Old Man up there in the sky!" Then he nudged me in the ribs: "Do you know how to mix an elephant into a bowl of cereal?" I said no, in a solemn straight-man's way, how do you

mix an elephant into a bowl of cereal? "You follow the directions on the back of the box."

A moment later Julian fell forward on the bed, his voice broke in a sob as he said, "I feel sick. I feel very, very sick." And with a sense of wonder he added, "Everything is going black!"

And then I rocked him in my arms, I pressed my face to his wet cheeks streaming with tears, I told him to sleep, to sleep and mixed my tears with his, wondering all the while why they fell, and until the final shades of darkness lifted I clutched him and rocked him, and finally the blackness passed.

✠ ✠ 9 ✠ ✠

At sunset in the Caribbean on a clear winter night the sky is a waterfall of silver color. Diamond stars rush down all the curves of the earth — Capella and Castor and Pollux shine overhead, and I close my eyes to fix their image. Jupiter presides in the eastern sky, and Venus, burnished to moon-brightness, in the west. The Milky Way, high in the north, extends like a fair protecting arm over all.

"It is speculation, but there is nothing else to go on," Julian said. "There are great chess players in the world. Most of them will be in Buenos Aires. The Russians have weaknesses, but their strengths are greater. My plans can't take in all the possibilities — or all the players. I may lose, no matter how much strategy I have. Maybe not to Tahl or Spassky. Some new player can come along. Anything can happen."

Anything, I thought. Anything at all.

Reluctantly I looked away from Procyon, down the vast pale wall of the sky to the ocean, and over into his eyes.

"You can never account for every possibility," I said. "Obviously."

"But you try. You have to have some way to prepare, and get ready. Otherwise you never know where to go from here — which direction to take. Take Tahl. I know his games like my own. I think I know what to do. I know all their games. Before April, I will know all there is to know."

A warm breeze drifted in off the ocean as, in the dying light, I watched Rebecca walking in bare feet along the water's edge. In the distance I could see a dark line of migrating birds; then once more I searched out dim Procyon.

"Of course you make a lot of wrong turns," he said. "Mistakes. But if you have the desire — if you have the desire and hold to it — well, you might get to where you're trying to go. . . ."

I followed the path of a long cloud in the west as it spiraled up, up like a misty castle. "The secret is to hold to it," I said.

Rebecca walked toward us along the beach and sat between us on the cooling sand.

"I will," he promised. "The World Championship in two years, and then marriage."

Julian held Rebecca's hand and she smiled at him fondly.

"And where will you live?" I asked.

"I don't know yet."

"We don't know, Father. Maybe Manhattan."

"It would be premature to decide now," Julian said. "A lot can happen in two years."

I nodded and said, "Do you still have that idea you once had — to live in a house like a rook?"

Julian looked at me blankly. "I never told you about that."

"Yes, you did," I said. But of course he hadn't.

"But I remember what I tell people. . . ." He shrugged. "I must be slipping."

"So you've given up the idea of the house like a rook?"

"It doesn't seem very practical," Julian said. "Not in New York — and I guess New York is the place to live."

Rebecca, looking at me strangely, rose and said, "You two can catch up with me. I want to take one last walk along the beach."

We sat in silence, and I smoked a cigarette, and then we strolled slowly after her — my daughter. A plane moved through the blue air, its red and green blinking lights looped among the stars, and for some reason, in what seemed like a single motion, we stopped and stared up at the sky. Then I turned and looked at Julian. He was not aware of me. His expression at first was almost saturnine. But then, gradually, something blossomed on his face as subtle as

the lightest breath of wind on a leaf — a whiteness, a sudden and impermanent removal of regret and loss — a whiteness that brushed away certain lines and planes reducing his belligerence, his fear, to nothing — a white softness that turned the corners of his mouth down in a position susceptible to honest pain. This perishable and thrilling transformation reminded me of nothing so much as a fragment of his lost childhood. His and mine.