WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

THESIS

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By

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At the beginning of the novel, the main character, J. D. Alfred, is a young, immature college freshman, naive both socially and sexually. In the initial chapter, however, he encounters a "mysterious" dark-haired girl, older than himself and very experienced.

Near the middle of the novel J.D. begins a quest, not quite sure what it is he is looking for. As he moves from place to place, he discovers more and more about his family, his friends, the world around him, and the woman with whom he has become entangled, discoveries which he chooses to ignore until too late. He is left with only one choice to make, whether to die a fiery death, or live to deal with problems which he is not yet equipped to handle.
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CHAPTER I

J.D. strutted down the hall enjoying his freedom. He moved smoothly and confidently, with a certain air of worldliness.


It was still early in March, but already the fine Texas weather had turned warm. It was a night for adventure.

J.D. strode to a stop in front of Tino's room. He opened the door and entered without knocking. Tino was asleep.

"Up! Up! Now is no time to be asleep! The whole world is out there hustling around and you're in here with your eyes shut. Don't you know what might happen? Something might slip by without your even seeing it. Like that little piece of action out there."

Tino sat up quickly to see what J.D. was pointing at out the window. Just getting out of a blue MG was a girl with long blond flowing hair, wearing cutoffs and a halter top. J.D. jumped up and pressed his nose against the window pane. Tino fell back on the bed laughing.

"Whooseee! What did I tell you. You've got to keep those eyes open."

J.D. continued pressing against the glass until the girl was out of sight. Then he fell into a chair across from the bed with a sigh of relief.
"The women on this campus are something else," J.D. said.
"That one looked like she was at least a senior," Tino said.
"So?"
"So she probably wouldn't look twice at a couple of freshmen like us."
"We don't have to tell her that," J.D. said.
"You think you can pass yourself off as a senior?"
"Sure. I pass myself off as a freshman, even though I'm only seventeen."
"But you are a freshman."
"That's just the point. I look like a freshman. A lot of people mistake me for being older than that, even."
Tino laughed. He was happy to see his friend in such a good mood. Sometimes he could be very depressed.
"What are we going to do tonight, J.D.?" he said.
J.D. leaned back and looked at the webbing which hung from the ceiling, thinking.
Just then the door opened and a tall lanky fellow with a gaunt face, wild eyes, and glasses came in carrying a paper bag. It was Tino's roommate, James Pinckney Adams. The two smiled as James took a bottle of rubbing alcohol out of the paper bag. He threw the bag up onto the netting, where it joined several others. Then James jumped up onto the top bunk of the bed like a high jumper going over the bar and settled himself down to reading a novel written in French. They saw that he was in one of his moods, so they ignored him.
"Tonight I feel like having a real adventure," J.D. said. "Tonight is the night that we should climb to the top of the pressbox."

"We're liable to get arrested if we climb up there," Tino said. "They could kick us out of school."

"That's the whole point of an adventure in the first place," J.D. said. "The element of danger is what makes it exciting."

Tino fell back on the bed again, laughing. "Sometimes I think we get too much excitement and adventure."

The two fell to laughing and joking, not in the least bit afraid that they would disturb James. He lived in a world of his own.

"Now, we've been talking about climbing up there for a long time," J.D. said. "Tonight's the night we actually go out and do it."

"OK," Tino said. "If John and New York go along, I'm all for it."

Tino got up and dressed. Suddenly out the window he caught sight of the blond returning to her car.

"Here's your chance," Tino said. "Go out there and show that chick what you're worth."

"If I show her that, I will get arrested," J.D. said, springing to open the window. "I'll just let her know what's up and we'll take it from there."

J.D. climbed out the window and walked over to the girl who was just getting into the MG. From that distance, Tino
could not hear what they were saying, but after a moment J.D. got into the car also and the two of them drove away.

"My God," Tino said aloud, shaking his head. "He did it."

After dinner the would-be commandoes assembled in John's room. John was tall with thick frizzy brown hair. Once, John fell face first through a window, and he carried scars across his brow and cheekbones which could almost be described as frightening. John was a little older than the others, so they all looked up to him for leadership. Tonight he would lead the scaling of the pressbox.

J.D., Tino, and James had all assembled wearing dark clothes and carrying gloves to ward off the barb wire.

"Where's New York?" J.D. said, "We can't go without New York."

"He's too fat to be climbing fences," Tino said.

"Never mind that," John said. "When we go, we'll all go together."

"He might get his nose caught on the barbed wire," Tino said.

They all laughed. In fits of revelry J.D. called the Jewish Brooklyn native the Messiah, a title which New York enjoyed immensely.

Suddenly the door burst open and New York walked in. But he wasn't alone. With him were a long-haired guy and a mysterious-
looking dark haired girl. The girl moved as if lost in a fog bank. Her eyes were cloudy and slightly red tinged.

This girl is stoned out of her mind, J.D. thought to himself.

The others continued to plot and plan, waiting for darkness. J.D. sat a little apart and watched the girl. J.D. was distracted. The girl had entered without uttering a word and was wandering about mindlessly, looking at the things which hung from the wall and the parachute which hung from the ceiling. J.D. became vaguely aware that she was watching him out of the corner of her eye. She moved constantly, pausing rarely, but so slowly as to appear totally unhurried. Every time she turned, her glance momentarily fixed upon J.D., her face marking this glance with a slight flare of the nostrils. J.D. watched her fitfully, sitting on the edge of the bed, trying to pretend that his interest was on the animated conversation before him.

"But we should split up."

"How about a scout? We wouldn't be caught as easily that way."

"... separate into two groups."

"He could keep a lookout for the campus cops."

"Then if some of us are caught the rest could get away."

The girl turned, her dark eyes alighting on J.D., her nostrils flaring. J.D. watched her closely without looking at her. Again she turned, her glance boring into him. He
began to feel aroused. Here was a girl (plain though she may be) who seemed to be taking a great deal of interest in him. He felt his muscles tighten and he tried to shift his body on the bed so that she wouldn't notice. The girl's eyes swept over him again and their vivid brown showed an intenseness which caught J.D. by surprise. He didn't have time to look away. He froze, his gaze locked with that of the girl. Her pupils swelled as if a mouth, straining to open and swallow him whole. Then her eyes flitted away as she crossed the room once more.

J.D. was in turmoil. He had let the girl know of his interest long before he was ready. Now she had the upper hand. She held him as if under a spell, jerking his interest back and forth across the room. He watched her without looking at her.

"J.D. Hey, J.D."

"What? Oh, what is it?"

Everyone was looking at him. He was vaguely aware that someone had asked him a question.

"That chick, man, the one with the MG," said John.

"What about her?" The girl now stood right beside him reading a record jacket. She smelled faintly of leather.

"What did you do with her?"

J.D. stole a glance at the girl, who was now close enough for him to reach out and touch. She was lost to the world.

"Oh, we drove around a little," he said, "Went out to the lake for a while. Nothing really."
"I'll bet," John said.

They just laughed and went back to their conversation.

But J.D. couldn't ignore the girl. She had turned toward him, standing right at his elbow. She continued reading the record jacket in such a way that by merely lifting her eyes slightly she could look right at him. He was more nervous and excited and aroused than ever. He watched her without looking at her.

It was dark now, dark enough to begin. The other commandoes called for J.D. to join them in a circle. They checked their equipment. Everything was ready to go. J.D. stuffed his gloves into his back pocket.

James had left the room and was flying up and down the hall with his black raincoat draped around him like a phantom. He ran up to a girl walking down the hall and stopped, staring into her face from six inches away. He paused there only a moment, then he ran back up to the rest of the group, laughing hideously. The girl looked terror stricken. She ran off and disappeared into a doorway.

The commandoes assembled by the exit. The long-haired guy and the mysterious dark-haired girl said good-bye and walked off down the hall. J.D. was aware that the girl hadn't said a single word the entire time she was in John's room. He was also aware that as she walked off down the hall she kept glancing back over her shoulder at him. He watched her walk down the hall and disappear. He watched her without looking at her.
The group moved outside trying not to make a sound. They stole across the street and crouched behind an apartment building. Their breathing was light and airy with excitement. John called them together to give last minute instructions. J.D. paid little attention. The image of the mysterious dark-haired girl was caught, dangling in the corner of his mind. The image flitted about teasingly, much as the girl herself had done, frustrating his desire to concentrate.

"Stick together now, here we go."

The commandoes crept along the base of the embankment which ran parallel to the street which led to the stadium. They stayed low and reached the stadium unseen. They climbed over the outside fence at the gate. By standing on the latch they were able to slide through the space, avoiding the barb wire at the top.

Once inside the commandoes climbed up the stands on the far side to the base of the press box. Their breathing was very heavy now.

John took charge, "OK, here's the ladder. Tino, you stand watch. If you see a cop car coming, sing out. Up we go, now."

Along the top of the stands was a chain link fence, placed there several years before to prevent over-enthusiastic fans from falling the hundred feet or so to the ground. The ladder to the roof of the press box was just inside of this fence, right at the very top of the seats.
Tino took his position watching the interstate. But he couldn't make out what kind of cars were coming because of the darkness. He listened to John giving orders behind him.

"First me, then New York, Jim, and J.D. in that order."

Tino heard them climbing the ladder.

J.D. was still distracted. The image of the girl was still in his mind. After the others had scaled the ladder he began climbing. He could still see the girl in his mind. As his right foot reached the fourth rung, he started to bring up his left foot to follow it. But the cuff of his bell bottoms caught on something. He couldn't pull his foot up. He looked down and saw that his pantleg was snagged on the top of the chain link fence. He leaned over to pull it loose, holding onto the ladder with one hand and reaching down with the other.

His hand slipped.

Tino heard a faint cry and turned just in time to see J.D. slide over the top of the fence from the ladder as if he were diving into a pool in slow motion. As he fell, J.D. reached out instinctively and grabbed hold of the top of the fence. But as the force of his body plummeted over the precipice, J.D.'s hand twisted and a pointed end of wire gouged deep into the flesh between his thumb and forefinger. Somehow he was able to hook the snagged leg over the top of the fence. Loose ends of wire dug into his thigh, shredding his jeans. He swiveled over the edge like a loose shutter, his
face and body slamming into the fence. His glasses fell off, taking nearly two seconds to hit the ground. It seemed like an eternity.

Tino froze. In an instant, he thought, his friend would plunge to his death.

"J.D., J.D., hold on, we gotcha!"

John looked over the edge of the pressbox and scrambled down. The others followed.

"Hold on tight. We'll pull you back over."

"My hand is caught my hand is caught my hand is caught my hand my hand.."

"Hold on to his arm! Here you grab hold of his shirt!"

"I've got him. Lift him up by his belt."

"My hand is caught my hand.."

They each grabbed a part of J.D.'s body and desperately dragged it back across to the safe side of the fence. J.D.'s hand wrenched free, spurting blood. J.D. clutched it tightly with his other hand. His blue jeans began to turn purple where the fence had torn through.

John took him firmly by the wrist. "Open your hand," he said.

J.D. opened it. The blood trickled down his arm. John looked at the wound, then rolled the hand into a fist.

"Hold it just like that. Tight!"

J.D. held his hand in a fist. He really didn't feel any pain. Fear dominated his mind but the instinct of survival
ruled his body. His instinct for survival was so strong that he probably could have saved himself without help.

All the romance was gone. They had to get to the infirmary to have J.D. sewed up. Tino went to find J.D.'s glasses while the others started back. As they trotted along, J.D. with his hand clenched before him, they were silent. J.D. could see the girl in his mind.

When J.D. and the others reached the infirmary, the front door was locked. They went around to the back and found a button by the door which said: "Push for Emergencies." They pushed the button.

At the far end of the hall (which they could see through a window in the door) appeared a nurse. Apparently the emergencies which she was used to treating were minor because she approached the door very slowly.

"What is she doing?" J.D. said. "Is she going for a walk or what?"

J.D. lost his patience and began kicking the door and yelling:

"Hey, there's somebody dying out here!"

The nurse broke into a run. She reached the door and flung it open breathlessly.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" she cried.

"My hand," J.D. said quietly, holding up the bloody limb.

"Is that all?" she said annoyed. "What was all that yelling about?"
"Yelling? What yelling?" John said in mock surprise. "We were only trying to help our friend here."

New York snickered. James stared at the nurse openly from a close distance.

"I cut my hand," J.D. said with rising anger.

"Let's see it." The nurse was young. She didn't look that much older than the commandoes themselves.

J.D. held his hand out and opened it. Dark red blood oozed from the cut. The nurse looked at the cut and turned pale. She turned away from the group, trying to avoid James, who was now only inches away.

I've never seen a nurse who was afraid of the sight of blood, J.D. thought to himself.

"All right," she said finally, "Come on in."

She led J.D. to an examination room. John went into the room with J.D., but New York and James began to creep up and down the hall. As they came to a door, they would flatten themselves against the wall, looking around the corner into the darkened room as if vampires looking for their next victim. Just as they were in the process of finishing one side of the hall, a nurse, much older than the first, appeared from the same room from which the young nurse had come. From the way they were dressed and the way they were acting, sneaking around looking in doors, she took them for burglars.

"What are you doing there?" she said, trying to sound authoritative.
James and New York straightened up, trying to look innocent. "We're here with a friend," New York said.

"Where is this friend?" the nurse asked.

"Down the hall there, getting his hand sewed up," New York said. During this whole exchange James stared at the nurse with wild eyes, like a cornered animal.

"Let's go find this friend," the nurse said. She tried to herd the two down the hall to the room where J.D. was, but every few steps James would stop, turn, and stare at the nurse until she got close enough to touch, then he would give a small cry and run in terror to hide behind New York.

When they finally reached the examination room, the young nurse was cleaning out the cut in J.D.'s hand. She still looked pale. Upon entering the room, James went and crawled under a table.

Huddled together, the commandoes looked very sinister, with their dark clothing and gloves.

"How did you cut your hand?" the older nurse said, suspiciously.

"I was climbing a fence, and my hand slipped," J.D. said. "You see, we were climbing. . ." J.D. began to realize just how ridiculous the truth would sound in a situation like that. The older nurse watched him carefully, as if any moment a confession would flash across his forehead. J.D. decided to remain silent and let the nurse wonder. She contented herself by standing by watching the work of the young nurse.
The young nurse finished cleaning J.D.'s hand and began to stitch it up awkwardly. She was quite inept, and the process was painful. Moreover, she seemed to be sicken even more than before by the sight of the open wound. She was very pale. When she finally finished the hand, she was visibly relieved.

"But what about my leg?" J.D. asked.

The young nurse looked at the leg, then at the older nurse, then back at the leg.

"Let's have a look," the older nurse said.

Before anyone could say anything else, J.D. unbuckled his belt and dropped his pants. The young nurse stared for a moment then turned away. John and New York began to laugh.

"Damn, you forgot your drawers," John said, falling up against the wall laughing.

The young nurse's face turned red. Trying not to look, she turned toward the window. Suddenly, a face appeared right in front of her on the other side of the glass. She screamed in terror. She tried to turn and run, but James had crawled out from underneath the table and was standing right behind her. When she turned, they were face to face.

She fainted.

James began to run around the room, laughing hysterically. John was barely able to stand, he was laughing so hard. New York opened the window and let Tino crawl through into the room.
"Here's your glasses, J.D.,” Tino said. "One of the lenses popped out and it took me a while to find it."

The older nurse was frantic. She was trying to rouse the young nurse and chase the commandoes out of the room at the same time.

"Out! Out! Everyone but the patient, out!"

By the time John, New York, and Tino pulled themselves together and caught James, he had worked himself into such a state that they had to carry him out and down the hall with the older nurse at their heels. They had just about reached the door to the outside when James broke their grip, dodged the nurse and ran back up the hall into the examination room. J.D. had just managed to hitch up his pants and wake up the younger nurse when James reappeared in the doorway. When she saw James, she screamed. James reacted by taking one step and lunging head first through the air, right at her.

She fainted again.

James flew over the unconscious body of the nurse out the window, landing in the bushes. He then got quickly to his feet and ran off, still laughing hysterically. His pursuers followed him through the door.

"Where'd he go?"

J.D. pointed dumbly at the open window. The three piled across the room and out, being careful not to step on the nurse. They ran off into the night. The older nurse came through the door puffing heavily. She watched the last of
the commandoes disappear out of the window, then glared at J.D., who was still kneeling beside the younger nurse.

"Get out of here you fiend!" she cried. She picked up a jar full of tongue depressors and threw it at his head. J.D. dived out the window, got to his feet and ran, leaving the body of the younger nurse and the cries of the older nurse far behind.

J.D. ran all the way back to the dorm. When he got back to his room he looked at his leg, but it wasn't as badly hurt as he thought. His hand didn't hurt yet, but it throbbed a little. He knew it would begin to hurt pretty soon.

He changed his clothes and headed downstairs to Tino's room. All of the lights in the hallway were turned off at night except by the exits, so as J.D. approached Tino's door he could barely see. But down the hall he could hear a clinking sound like the rattle of a chain. When he got to Tino's door he opened it and in the half light he could see a figure hunched over walking toward him with one arm held close to the side and the other swinging freely. It was James. He had stuffed something into the back of his shirt to look like a hump, and was staggering along the hall with a chain draped around his neck. He lunged up to J.D. and made a few groaning sounds, then took hold of the injured hand and made a grunt which sounded like a question, rising in pitch at the end.
"It's all right. It's just now starting to hurt a bit," J.D. told him.

James made a groan of approval and swayed off down the hall, back into the darkness. J.D. walked into the room.

"J.D.! Hey, we thought you were dead or arrested," Tino said. "Where have you been?" John and New York were sitting on the bed.

"I managed to escape, but just barely."

They all laughed. They told jokes and laughed.

After awhile, J.D.'s hand began to hurt from the blood surging through it.

"What's the matter, J.D.?” Tino asked. "Does it hurt that bad?"

"It'll be all right," J.D. said.

"I think I have something that would help you," John said. "Just a minute, I'll be right back."

John ran off down the hall in the direction of his room. A moment later he reappeared holding a prescription bottle containing several large pink pills.

"Take a couple of these," John said. "They'll do wonders for you."

J.D. took two of the pills. John watched him closely.


"What was that, anyway?" J.D. asked.

"Demerol," John said. "I got them when I fell through the window. I used to take one, and wham, I'd get knocked right on my ass."
They all looked at J.D.

"Maybe you better sit down," Tino said.

J.D. sat on the bed. "I don't feel a thing," he said.

Suddenly the room began to tilt slightly. At first J.D.
didn't notice it too much, but the tilt worsened until he
thought he'd fall off the bed. He held on to the blanket.
The room seemed to be in much sharper focus than usual.
John, New York, and Tino all seemed to be moving in slow mo-
tion. When they leaned over to speak to him, their faces
appeared to be huge in comparison with their bodies. The
lights in the room looked like gasoline rainbows in a puddle.
They were trying to ask him something. Their voices sounded
like a faint echo from a great distance away.

"How does that feel?" John said.

J.D. tried to answer immediately, but the words didn't
come right out. It seemed like many minutes before he was
able to say anything.

"Feels good," he said finally. They all laughed. J.D.
laughed too. Suddenly he felt conscious of the fact that he
was laughing. He thought this was even funnier. It took him
a long time to stop laughing. Everything seemed funny. He
thought about how he had nearly killed himself, and that was
funny. He thought about the cut in his hand, and even that
was funny. The fact that the world was round was funny. J.D.
laughed at everything.

After a while, J.D. stopped laughing and became merely
amused. It made him feel very superior to know just how funny
the world really was. He sat back watching what little of it he could actually see, knowing that the rest was the same way. The hand didn't hurt anymore at all.

After a while there was a knock on the door. When it was opened the long-haired guy and the mysterious dark-haired girl came in. They seemed like they were a long way away. The others began telling the two new arrivals what had happened to J.D. The mysterious dark-haired girl was very interested. She came over and sat on the floor beside the bed where J.D. was lying.

"What's your name?" the girl asked him.

"J.D."

"Mine's Julia. You look kind of spaced out."

"I cut my hand," J.D. said, showing her the bandage. "John slipped me some stuff to kill the pain, and it really went to work on me."

Julia took his hand and cradled it in her own hands. A sympathetic look of pain came across her face.

"You poor baby," she said. "Does it hurt much?" J.D. let out a stoned giggle. "It doesn't hurt at all, not now."

She laughed. She looked pretty when she laughed.

"Do you go to school here?" J.D. asked.

"I'm working on a masters. I got my bachelors from U.T. I taught for a couple of years, but I didn't like it. My parents offered to pay if I came up here."
"Just how old are you?"

"24." Here eyes were bright and alive, not cloudy like they were before.

They talked for a while, but J.D. became very incoherent and eventually fell asleep. When he woke up, she was gone. His friends helped him up to his room and put him to bed. He went to sleep and dreamed about Julia.
CHAPTER II

J.D. didn't wake up until late the next afternoon. His head was fuzzy and numb and his hand throbbed. He decided to take a shower and relax until dinner. He had missed all of his classes anyway.

For a long while after his shower J.D. sat by the window playing his guitar. Occasionally someone walking by below would stop and appear to listen. He didn't regret not going to class that day, especially his English class. He did not get along well with his English professor, who was old and ugly and unmarried, and J.D. suspected, hated men. She obviously hated J.D. She berated him in class and deliberately undergraded his work. J.D. tried to avoid her, but he couldn't help getting into bitter arguments. It all dated from an incident on the second day of school. By coincidence, James happened to be in the same class that J.D. was in. The professor asked J.D. why a poet used a certain word at the end of a line.

"Because it rhymes with the last word of the line two lines before," J.D. had said. Ordinarily James was subdued in class, but on this particular occasion he had stood up and read the whole verse aloud, stressing the two words J.D. had meant.
"See? I told you they rhymed," J.D. said when he was through.

The professor had stared at the two of them for several minutes with her mouth open before answering.

"If either of you expects to get a good grade in this class, I suggest you take it a bit more seriously." Her voice cracked as she spoke. It was little more than a hoarse whisper.

"But those two words do rhyme," J.D. said, quite seriously.

James sprang to his feet to read the verse again.

"Sit down!"

He sat down slowly, like a dog which has just been kicked.

"This class shall be conducted in a scholarly manner," the professor said. "I would appreciate it greatly if everyone were to keep that in mind and try to behave accordingly."

J.D. stared at the top of his desk trying desperately not to laugh. Although J.D. had restrained himself since then, the professor was openly hostile in class and ignored him completely outside of class.

So J.D. sat and played his guitar by the open window.

About four o'clock, New York came bursting into the room.

"Do you always have to bust through a door like that?" J.D. said. "You scare the shit out of me!"

"Why?"
"I think you're some kind of narc or something."
"Don't worry. They never bust these dorms. They're the safest place in the world."
"I'll remember that when it comes time to post bail."
New York laughed and sat down at the desk.
"Where were you earlier?" New York asked.
"Right here. I've been right here all day."
"You weren't here at lunch time. The door was locked."
"I was here. I was asleep."
"Why did you lock the door if you was here?"
"I got tired of you waking me up in the morning. So I locked the door to keep you out."
"It's too bad you did lock me out this morning."
"Why?"
"You know that chick, the chick in John's room last night? She was looking for you at lunch time."
J.D. sat up straighter. He tried to be very cool.
"So she was looking for me. So what?"
"I think she's hot for ya. You might be able to screw her."
J.D. felt the blood rush through his body. The hair on the back of his neck tingled.
"So she wants to screw. So what? I screw a lot of chicks," he lied.
"This chick wants it bad. David told me all about her."
"What did he tell you?"
New York began to giggle. "He told us everything. Everything that happened from beginning to end."

"He told you that? I don't believe you."

"Go ask him yourself."

"Sure. Sometime maybe."

"Right now. Let's go ask him now."

"Later maybe."

"Come on. That chick might be down there."

Finally J.D. put his guitar up and followed New York downstairs. David lived on the first floor, down the other end of the hall from where Tino lived. When they got there New York burst right through the door. There was a mad scramble inside as David and a few others tried to hide a lid until they realized that it was only New York.

"What are you doing, coming through the door like that? You're going to give us a heart attack."

New York just laughed and motioned for J.D. to follow him in.

"So, you brought him along with you. Have a seat, have a seat."

After J.D. and New York sat down, David brought the lid back out. He took a cigarette paper and spread it out, then poured some of the grass out onto the paper and rolled it into a makeshift cigarette. He held it up to the light for a moment, then set it aside and began the process again.

"It's too bad you weren't in your room about lunch time," David said to J.D.
"I was there. I was just asleep."
"Too bad you didn't wake up."

He finished rolling the second joint, set it aside, picked up the first joint, struck a match and lighted it. He drew the smoke deep into his lungs and held it, talking while holding his breath.

"Julia was really hot for you this morning. Sometimes she just wakes up that way."
"You shoulda seen her, boy. She was really hot. She was running around all over the place, trying to find your room, saying 'Where's that guy live? Where's that guy live?' Boy she was really hot."

"What's with this chick, anyway? Doesn't she ever get laid?"

"Oh it's not that," David said. "She can't get enough."
"You the expert?"
"Believe me. I know what I'm talking about."

David passed the joint over to New York. He took a deep draw and passed it to J.D. J.D. took a hit and passed it on. He felt the effects almost immediately.

"This is pretty good stuff."
"Works like that every time."

They all smoked on quietly until the first joint was gone. Then David put the roach back into the lid and lighted up the second joint. They smoked this one down, too. Then David turned on his stereo and they all lay back and listened.
J.D. felt very mellow. It seemed as if his mind had left his body and was floating around on its own. He realized finally that David was speaking to him.

"But you won't be able to handle her. I don't think anybody can."

"What, now?"

"Julia. You won't be able to handle her."

"The way you guys talk about this chick, you'd think you knew all about her."

"I know all about her. I've had first hand experience."

"You've done it with her yourself?"

"Sure."

"Is she any good?"

"She's too good. She wears you out, then she wants more."

"I don't think she could ever wear me out."

"That's what I thought until she got ahold of me."

"I have staying power."

"We'll just have to fix you up with her and see."

David walked over and dialed the phone. He listened for a while and hung up.

"She's not home right now. I'll call her back later."

J.D. began to feel hungry. He jumped up and started to dance around the room.

"Hey New York, get that fat carcass of yours up and let's go get something to eat. Come on, let's go get something to eat."
New York just lay on the bed and laughed as J.D. danced.

"What about calling that chick?"

"If she wants to do it bad enough she'll find me. Let's go eat."

"You go eat. I'm going to stay here for a while."

J.D. ran over to the bed and started pulling on New York's leg, trying to pull him off the bed.

"Leggo of me! Leggo my leg!"

J.D. managed to pull him half off the bed. New York grabbed the headboard to keep from falling on the floor.

"Come on. Let's go get something to eat."

"Leggo my leg. Come on, leggo!"

J.D. finally gave up and let go.

"The cafeteria's open and everything," he said.

"I'll eat later. You go ahead."

"All right. I'll see you later."

J.D. burst out the door and up the hall. Tino was just coming out of his room.

"You going to eat? I'll go with you."

Tino turned around and looked at J.D.

"What the hell have you been smoking?"

"Let's go eat. I'm hungry."

"OK, OK, I'll go, I'll go."

Tino followed J.D. up the hall as he took a running start and jumped in the air, barely touched the EXIT sign high above the door to the stairwell, and crashed into the
wall. He collapsed on the floor. Tino ran up to help, but J.D. was already getting up, apparently unharmed.

"You could have killed yourself."

"Didn't hurt a bit."

But J.D. was more subdued after hitting the wall. They walked down to the cafeteria. They were stopped at the door by the attendant.

"What's your name?" the attendant said.

"Joshua Alfred Prufrock," J.D. said.

"That's not your name."

J.D. turned in mock surprise.

"It most certainly is. Joshua Alfred Prufrock."

"Listen. You come here everyday. I know your name, and it ain't Joshua Alfred Prufrock. There's no meal card for any Joshua Alfred Prufrock."

"If you know my name so well, then why did you ask me what it was?"

"Because I'm supposed to. That's the rules."

"I changed my name since yesterday. Now it's Joshua Alfred Prufrock."

There was a line forming behind J.D. and Tino.

"Look, if you don't tell me your name or pay, you don't eat."

"Fuck you. I'll eat anyway."

J.D. stalked by the attendant's table and headed for the food line. The attendant got up and started to follow, but Tino stopped him.
"Why don't you just leave him alone. You know his name as well as I do."

"I'm supposed to ask everyone's name."

"Come one. You know his name. Quit screwing around and let us in."

The attendant broke away from Tino's grasp and ran after J.D. As soon as he was away from the door, the line of people started to come in, not caring if their names were checked or not. When the attendant caught up to J.D., he was halfway through the line.

"Stop that guy! He didn't pay!"

The guy behind the counter looked up in surprise.

"J.D. has a meal card. He doesn't have to pay."

"That's what I tried to tell him," J.D. said.

"He wouldn't tell me his name. He can't get in until he tells me his name and I check his card."

"He knows my name. I've been coming in here since last September."

The line which had formed at the door was now coming through the food line. The cafeteria supervisor stepped out of the kitchen to see what was going on.

"This guy's trying to steal some food," the attendant said, grabbing J.D. by the arm.

"I am not. I have a meal card. I paid for this food." He shook loose from the attendant and began to wind up to take a swing at him. Tino stopped him just in time.
"That guy lives here, Joe," the supervisor said. "What are you bothering him for?"

"He wouldn't tell me his name."

"Don't you know everybody's name by now?"

"He said he knew my name," J.D. said.

"But he wouldn't tell it to me."

"Get back out there and do your job. About thirty guys came through while you were busy chasing this one."

The attendant looked horrified.

"Everybody back out front so I can check their meal card!"

"Joe, for God's sake, just get back out there and stay there."

The attendant walked back reluctantly and began flipping over the cards in the file savagely. The supervisor turned to J.D.

"Try not to give him a hard time. That's about the only thing he can do around here without breaking something."

Just then, as he was flipping a card with extra fury, the file turned over and fell on the floor, spilling meal cards out all over. The whole cafeteria burst into applause. Joe hid his head in his hands.

J.D. laughed so hard he could barely eat. Every time Tino looked at him he cracked up.

"You shouldn't go bothering people like that."

J.D. laughed. "I just couldn't help myself. Did you see the look on that guy's face when he realized that all those others got through without being checked?"
They laughed and tried to finish eating. When they were done, they went out and got into Tino's car and drove around campus. J.D. would lean out the window when he saw someone walking beside the street and scream at them in a frenzied voice.

After about an hour of this, J.D. began to calm down.

"Let's go out in the country. I know where this bridge is over a creek that's really far out at night."

With J.D. giving directions, they headed out toward open country away from town, near the airport.

"Right here. Take a left."

The card headed down a dirt road, winding around cow pastures and over gently rolling hills.

"Right here, this is it." Tino took the corner on two wheels. The car ran off the road, into a ditch, shot back out onto the road and nearly into the ditch on the other side, throwing gravel in its wake.

"Whoeeeee!"

"It's right over this rise. Slow down."

As the car slowed and came over the hill, an old rail bridge was caught in the head lights.

"Pull over up here and stop."

Tino pulled over, and they got out.

"I like this spot. I like to come here to think."

They walked down to the bank of the creek and sat down. The black water bubbled gently as it flowed by.
The soughing of the breeze through the branches of the trees overhead calmed the frenzy of the two and put them into a more somber mood.

"This is a nice spot."

The black water flowed and bubbled.

"Have you heard about that chick, the one that's supposed to be after me? Have you heard about that?" J.D. asked.

"Who hasn't? Everybody knows."

The water bubbled and the breeze sighed through the trees.

"I don't know about her. Why is she after me?"

"You turn her on, I guess."

"Yeah, but why? Why does it work out that some guys turn on every chick they meet, and some turn on only a few here and there. I'd like to know how that works."

"Certain things appeal to certain people. We're all different."

"I'd still like to know what it is."

"Look, if you're lucky enough to find out that you turn on a chick, I wouldn't sit around wondering about it."

"You'd just go out and screw her and not worry about it, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, that's exactly what I'd do."

"Just like that, without a second thought?"

"Without a second thought."

"Bull shit."

The black water flowed and bubbled.
"You shouldn't think about things like that so much. You miss all the fun in life by trying to analyze everything all the time."

"I have fun. I have a good time."

"But you always ruin it later by trying to analyze it."

"Maybe so."

The wind blew and the water flowed.

"Listen," Tino said. "You don't have to prove yourself all the time. You do everything as if you're proving that you can do it too. Even when you're having a good time."

"I'm not trying to prove myself."

"You sure act like it."

"I'm not."

"So who cares, for God's sake."

"Yeah. Who cares."

"I didn't mean it that way."

"Yeah, I know you didn't."

"No, I mean it. I didn't mean it that way."

"O.K., O.K. I believe you."

They sat quietly for a long time, watching the water.

"Let's get out of here," J.D. said.

They walked back up to the car, got in and drove away.

They drove back to town and down to the campus. They rode around for a while then stopped and got out to walk.

"I didn't mean to piss you off back there. I really didn't," Tino said. "I'm your friend, and I'm just trying to help."
"I know. Forget it."

"What are friends for and all that."

"Yeah, I know. Just forget it. I'm your friend too."

"It's just that you get so damned depressed about everything all the time that I have to snap you out of it somehow. You get that way from thinking about everything so much. You shouldn't wonder about life so much. There is no set reason for everything. Just lay back and enjoy it."

"I am enjoying life," J.D. said.

"Sure, you enjoy yourself. More than most. But you shouldn't try to find a reason behind everything. There just aren't reasons for everything."

"I'll remember that."

"I'm serious."

"So am I."

They walked on across the campus through the night. In front of the library they came across a girl sitting by herself on a bench. They couldn't see her very well in the dark, but J.D. thought she was very pretty.

"I wonder why she's sitting there by herself?" J.D. said.

"See what I mean? You wonder too much. Why don't you just go and ask her?"

"Maybe she just had a fight with her boyfriend and she's trying to forget."
"Are you kidding? That's the best time."
"You ought to leave people alone at a time like that."
"Who cares? Do you want to pick her up or not?"
"Maybe she won't like me. Maybe I'll even scare her."
"See what I mean? You think about things too much."
"I guess I'm just not in the right mood."
"Are you afraid to go up and talk to her? I'll bet you're the one that's scared."
"Why should I be scared?" J.D. asked.
"I'll bet you are."
"I picked up that chick yesterday."
"You probably did that as a joke."
"That was no joke. I picked that girl up easy enough. Besides, she looked like she wanted to be picked up. This girl doesn't."

Just then the girl got up and walked away in the other direction.
"You let her get away," Tino said.
"She didn't want to get picked up."
"Sure she did. She could her us. She stuck around long enough to give us a chance."
"Then why didn't you try to pick her up?"
"I didn't want to."
"Then I didn't either."
"Sure you did. If you didn't want to, then why did you talk so much about picking her up?"
"Because you kept asking me why I didn't."
"Bull shit."

J.D. turned and walked off.

"Hey, come on back. I was just kidding."
J.D. didn't stop. He kept walking.

"J.D., hey J.D., come on back."

J.D. started to run. He ran all the way back to the dorm. Tino shook his head and walked to the car. J.D. would forget about the incident by morning and be back to his usual self. Tino never knew how J.D. was going to act.

When J.D. got to the dorm, he went straight to his room and locked the door. He tried to play his guitar for a while, but decided that he didn't feel like it. So he sat by the open window, leaning on the sill, and stared out blankly for a long time. He tried to hypnotize himself by blocking out all thoughts and numbing his mind. It helped him to relax.

Over the door to the outside was a concrete awning which stuck straight out from the building. It was below and to the right of J.D.'s window. He could see the top of it as he leaned out. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dark, he realized that someone was sitting on top of the awning. He leaned out farther and strained his eyes to make out who it was. It was James.

"James. What are you doing down there?"

James peered upward slowly.

"Don't want people to step on you, huh," J.D. said.
James nodded.

J.D. watched James for a while, then drew his head inside the window and got ready to go to bed. J.D. could feel depression come over him like a wave, drowning him, leaving him feeling hollow and empty. At such times he would crawl into bed and draw his knees up to his chest and pretend he was floating in water. So tonight when he got into bed, he drew his knees up to chest, and pretended that he was floating in water.
CHAPTER III

The week passed and J.D.'s hand mended and J.D. sat by the open window and played his guitar and enjoyed the early spring. The weekend came and J.D. skipped all his classes and was restless until he couldn't stand it anymore and he had to leave his room and look for something to do. He went downstairs and looked for Tino but Tino was gone and New York and David and all the rest. Finally he stopped in at John's room.

"J.D.! Hey, my man. Just who I wanted to see."

"I was upstairs looking out the window enjoying the view and the sunshine and sky and all. I had to get out and do something."

"I know just what you need." John walked over to his desk and took out two large lids.

"I don't know if that's what I need or not."

"Sure it is. I'll sell you one right now, if you want."

"How much are they?"

"Ten a piece."

"I haven't got any bread right now."

Just then there was a knock on the door. John walked over and opened it. It was Julia. J.D. felt his muscles tighten, just as when he first saw her. The blood rushed
through his body as he smelled the faint air of leather he remembered from before. Then a rapture settled upon him, much like that of the drug John had given him the night he cut himself.

"Well if it isn't little Julia," John said.
"Hi. I came to get the stuff."
"I've been trying to sell some to my man J.D., but he's not buying."
"I haven't got any bread."
Julia looked at him and smiled. "How's your hand?"
My hand, he thought; it's almost completely healed.
"It still hurts a little."
"Sorry to hear it."
J.D. started to leave.
"Where are you headed?"
"I don't know. I thought I'd take a walk and look at the sunset."
"Oh."
"Are we dealing here or not?" John said.
"We're dealing. Let's see what you have."
John showed her the lids. J.D. left and walked outside.
The sun was just going down. He walked around to the back and sat on the grass and looked at the sky. He still had that twinge, that smell of musky leather lingering at the back of his mind. He looked at the sunset, but he really didn't see it because he was filled with the shape of Julia's
chin and her eyes and the line of her mouth as she stood in repose.

J.D. tried to think of all the books he had read, trying to think of how the characters managed to conquer love. He thought of Ivanhoe and Rowena and how the sheer force of righteousness had stopped the heart of Bois-Guilbert and saved the fair Rebecca. He thought about that and tried to decide what to do.

Then someone stepped between him and the sun. He looked up and Julia stood there.

"Hi. I saw you sitting here."
J.D. filled again with the smell of musky leather.
"Sit down and look at the sky for a while."
Julia squinted at the sunset and shook her head.
"I have to go. I just came by to say hello."
"Did you buy that lid?"
"Yeah. I could give you some if you need it."
"I don't really need it. I'll buy some when I have the money."

Julia stood there for a moment and neither of them spoke. She shifted from one foot to the other.
"Well, I have to go," Julia said.
"I'll see you later."
"Are you going to stick around here?"
"I don't know. I don't know what I'm going to do."
"There's a speaker at the Union tonight, an anti-war activist."
"Are you going to be there?"

"Sure. It's at eight o'clock."

"I guess I might see you there."

"Sure. I'll see you there." Julia smiled at him and was gone.

J.D. couldn't stay still sitting on the grass. He jumped up and ran to his room and threw himself on the bed and stared at the ceiling and wrapped his arms tightly around his chest and breathed heavily and he really couldn't believe it but it was true what everybody had been saying all along. J.D. lay there for a long time until his heart slowed and mind cleared.

He would go, of course. This was the opportunity he'd been waiting for ever since he had gone to his bachelor uncle's house as a boy and found a stack of nudie magazines by accident. He'd been waiting a long time. He was ready now.

Eight o'clock came slowly. When it arrived, J.D. walked out into the night. J.D. liked the cool air and the stars in the sky. He liked the dark, too, because it was so easy to hide in. It didn't take him long to reach the center of campus. He had only to go a few blocks along a street which took him past the infirmary. He looked in through the window and could see the two nurses, the young one and the old one, sitting at a table, reading the paper. He almost went in to apologize but he was afraid they might hate him and that they
didn't want to see him so he decided not to at the last minute. He would have been late to the speech.

He reached the Union and went upstairs. The guy was already talking. There were about fifty people in the audience. J.D. entered silently and sat in the back. Julia was there, but she was sitting right in the front row, listening intently.

The speaker was a pacifist. He had been sent to prison for refusing to fight in World War II. He had also been arrested many times since then for breaking laws then passively resisting the police. He was proud of the fact that he'd broken so many laws since all of them were evil. So he was arrested. He had never been able to change any of the laws, but he was proud of all the nights he spent in jail. He was proud to be a pacifist and a breaker of evil laws. J.D. liked him immediately.

But tonight the pacifist was talking about Viet Nam. The draft must be resisted, he said, because war is violent and violence is evil. It was a matter of morals and a matter of ethics. This war was immoral. J.D. agreed. But when the speaker turned to technical details such as broken treaties J.D. was disappointed. J.D. thought that the speaker should have argued on moral principles alone and kept his speech pure.

At the end there was a question and answer period. Then the speaker invited everyone to help themselves to the reading material on the table at the back and dissolved into a quiet
throng of admirers. J.D. walked back and looked at the table. pamphlets mostly, how to avoid the draft and such information as that. J.D. was only seventeen and didn't have to sign up for the draft, but he found legalistic tricks distasteful. He believed that someone who felt strongly enough ought to denounce home and country and wander across the world in search of freedom.

J.D. kept looking at the pamphlets until he realized that someone was standing very close to his side. It was Julia.

"Hi. I told you I'd be here," J.D. said.

"So you did." She seemed cold and distant.

"Hey man, I think I'm going to blow this place. I know where there's a coffee house with some guitar players," Julia said.

She started off.

"I guess I'll go over there with you, if that's all right," J.D. said.

"Sure. Come on."

They left the Union and walked through the warm night air. J.D. was barely aware of anything except the girl beside him. Whenever the musky scent of leather reached him, a surge of blood would rush through him, causing him to swell with desire. She led him to a place on the edge of campus which looked like a small church. They entered the front doors, propped open to the night, into a foyer. To the front
and to the left were doors which were closed and to the right was a set of double doors which stood open. Beyond the doors was a large room filled with tables. At one end of the room was a small stage where four young men, students probably, stood playing guitars and singing in harmony. At the back was a girl selling coffee. She was reading a book. J.D. and Julia found a table and sat down.

J.D. liked the band. They played well. J.D. and Julia sat about half way back in the room. The beam of the spotlight was filled with smoke. At some of the tables were couples, holding their heads close together, talking in low voices. J.D. tried to imagine what the lovers were saying. Then he tried to lean close and speak to Julia, but couldn't think of anything to say, didn't really know what he was supposed to say.

"This is a good group."

Julia was solidly in repose, leaning back with one elbow resting on the table, the hand resting on her cheek. She did not respond or even act as if she heard. J.D. leaned back in his chair and tried to think of what his hero, Lord Byron, would do in a situation like this. Byron was probably never in a situation like this. The girls would always chase him. All he had to do was go along.

"Wait here. I'll be right back."

Julia got up and walked slowly out the door. J.D. watched the even shifting of her hips as she made her way through the
tables and once again he felt the surge of blood and the uncomfortable tightness.

He tried to watch the group but soon he found that his breathing was too rapid and that the air was stale. He craned his neck and looked over the room back to the door, but he couldn't see Julia anywhere. Between songs he got up from the table and walked to the entrance and on into the foyer. No one was there. He tried one of the other doors but it was locked. Then he walked to the door to the outside and stepped out into the cool evening air. He stood there a long time, breathing slowly. She probably got tired and went for a walk, he thought. I'll wait until she gets back. He went back inside and sat down, now at a different table. He listened to the music, but only subconsciously. He began to get bored. He was just about to go outside again when someone touched his arm. It was John.

"My man J.D. What are you doing sitting by yourself?"

"I was listening to the music."

"I thought Julia would have you up to her room by now. When she left my room this afternoon, she was really hot. She went looking for you. Didn't she find you?"

"She found me. She brought me here. Then she got up and left. I don't know where she went."

"That's the way she operates. She's letting you get riled up. She's also showing you who's in control."

"How do you know that?" J.D. asked.
"I know."

"Yeah, but how do you know?"

"I just know, that's all."

"I mean do you know first hand or what?"

"Just take my word for it."

"I just wanted to make sure it was your word and not somebody else's."

"Just trust me."

"O.K., I'll trust you."

"Don't get sore."

"I'm not sore. You're sure she'll be back, though."

"Believeme, she'll be back."

"O.K., I'll believe you."

"I know about things like this. She'll be back."

And she was back. She came through the tables just as the sound of John's voice faded into the music.

"So here you are. I told you to wait. Why did you change tables?"

John's eyebrows went up in surprise. He looked quickly at J.D.

"I wanted to sit closer to the music. I didn't know how soon you would be back."

"Well I found you all right. It doesn't matter."

She sat down between J.D. and John. They listened to the music.

"I have to go," John said. He got up.
"I'll see you later," J.D. said.

"Yeah, tomorrow, my man." He looked over at Julia and grinned. She waved goodbye without looking at him. Then he was gone.

"Do you know John very well?" J.D. had to know how well.

"I buy my grass from him."

"Oh."

They watched the group. J.D. wasn't listening at all.

"This place is getting to be a drag," Julia said.

"What else would you want to do?" J.D. felt the tightness from asking such a bold question.

"Do you want to go smoke some grass?" Julia asked.

"Where?"

"Let's go up to your place and smoke."

"They won't let women up there except on Saturday night."

"We can't go to my room. It's not cool there."

"Too bad we don't have a car."

"I have a car."

"We could go out in the country, then. I know a good spot."

"That sounds good. Let's go get the car."

They left the church-like building and walked back across campus to Julia's dorm. They found the car, a yellow Maverick, and Julia brought out the keys.

"Do you know how to drive a standard?" she asked.

"Sure."

"Do you want to drive, then?"
"Sure. Why not."

Julia got in the passenger side. She reached in the glove compartment and took out a lid and some papers.

"I wish I had a pipe. I don't roll so well," she said.

"I can roll in a moving car. I've done it lots of times."

"I'll bet you've done a lot of things."

"There are very few things I haven't done."

"I'll bet there's one thing you've never done."

How did she know about that?

"What's that?"

"Had an abortion."

Lots of girls had told J.D. that they'd had an abortion. He was no longer impressed by it.

"If you want to roll, then let's switch places and I'll drive."

"Sure. Take a left at the corner."

J.D. directed her to the edge of town, over the interstate, and into the country. She followed the road to the airport and turned left into the dirt road which J.D. pointed out. By the time they got there, J.D. had four joints rolled. J.D. had taken her to the bridge, the same place where he had taken Tino.

"Do you want to just sit in the car?" Julia asked.

"Whatever you want to do."

"I have a blanket in the trunk, you know, in case of emergencies."
"Let's go sit by the creek, then."

"That sounds nice."

They walked down to the bank of the creek and spread out the blanket. J.D. took out one of the joints.

"Here, light this up."

She struck a match and drew at the joint with long irregular breaths.

"This is pretty good stuff," she said, trying to hold in the smoke. She passed it over to J.D. He drew the sweet tasting smoke into his lungs and held his breath. He passed it back to her. He was waiting to see what she was going to do next.

The first joint was soon gone. They lit another. It was soon gone also. They did not speak. J.D. lay back on the blanket and looked up at the sky. It was a clear night. The moon was just beginning to rise. The branches of the trees which loomed in the pale light overhead seemed to be frozen in plastic. Everything was in much clearer focus than usual.

He noticed that there seemed to be something pressing against his chest. It was Julia's head. She was lying down beside him, using him as a pillow.

"It's a nice night."

"Yes, it is."

J.D. lay quietly. He put his arm around her shoulder. She drew nearer to him. J.D. listened to the rushing sound
of the stream. Julia reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck and drew him over on top of her. He looked down at her face. Her eyes were closed. He leaned down and kissed her. The blood rushed through him and he felt the tightness greatly as he rubbed against her. Just like Byron, he thought. The girl came after me. Just like Byron.

His glasses bumped against her nose. She reached up and took them off and laid them aside. She reached for his hand and guided. He felt for what should be there but couldn't find it. He didn't know what to do next. She took hold of his hand and pushed it farther down. There it was. He didn't realize that it would be so far back underneath. Then she was reaching for him but the tightness was gone and he didn't know why. She grasped harder with desperation but nothing happened and J.D. tried but nothing and he wondered what Byron would do and he didn't think Byron ever had this problem. What should he do?

Julia's excitement was much more evident, for she began to breathe in short quick gasps. She moaned loudly. The sound of her hoarse and rapid breathing blended with the rushing of the creek and the rushing of the blood through J.D.'s ears. What would Byron do?

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I've never had this problem before," he said truthfully.

"Hey, man, I understand. Just relax. Don't worry about it. It'll be all right. Here roll over on your back."
J.D. rolled over on his back. Julia continued to whisper soothingly into his ear. J.D. began to respond. Then she was on top of him.

I'm doing it, he thought, I'm actually doing it.

The two continued to thrust at each other for more than an hour. The moon draped an eerie half-light down on them through the branches of the trees. Finally it was over and they lay very still.

"Are you all right?" J.D. asked.

"Yes. I feel good."

"How was it?"

"Don't worry. It was wonderful."

"Sorry about right there at the beginning."

"Don't worry, it turned out all right. That happens sometimes the first time you're with someone."

J.D. was proud of himself. He was virile and desirable. They lay for a long time on the blanket until Julia began to feel cold. Then they walked back to the car and drove back to town. They sat in the car in the dorm parking lot for a while, talking.

"You're really sweet, you know that? You're the sweetest lover I've ever had."

"Thanks." J.D. felt empty and happy, free of pressure. She sat in his lap. He held his arms around her gently.

"Let's go up to your room."

"Women aren't allowed up there."
"Let's sneak up, then."

J.D. was charmed by the idea. It was exactly what Byron would have done. They waited until they couldn't see anyone, then they got out of the car. She waited outside while J.D. ran up the stairs. No one was there. He came back and got her, and they ran up the stairs and down the hall to his room. When they were safely inside, they collapsed on the bed laughing. Then J.D. remembered something. He went over to the window and looked out. There was James, sitting on the awning over the door.

"James."

James looked upward slowly.

"You won't say anything, will you?"

James grinned. J.D. could see his teeth glinting in the dark.
CHAPTER IV

The sun shone through the window and woke up J.D. and he opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling for a long time. The night before came back to him slowly, in bits and pieces as if it were a dream which would escape him if he didn't remember it right away. Which was the dream and which was real? J.D. focused his eyes on a spot on the ceiling, a brown spot on what was once white paint. That spot was never there before. But then the sun had never wakened him in the morning before, either, yet the sun was in his eyes and it didn't feel like afternoon but it must be but it wasn't. It felt to J.D. distinctly like morning, the light was more yellow than red, which is the way it is in the morning. It must be morning and yet it wasn't and yet it was.

J.D. sat up in bed and looked around. He felt dizzy and slightly sick. His head spun and he didn't see anything familiar. He was lying in a bed with a white bedspread pulled over him while his own bed had none. The bed was also lengthways in the room, instead of against the wall by the window as his own bed was. The window was on the wrong side and so was the door. J.D. did not know where he was; maybe he was dead; he couldn't remember going anywhere after falling asleep the night before. He was in the wrong room, and he felt a rush of blood up the back of his neck.
Then he began to remember that Julia had complained that the bed was too small and he agreed with her, but he didn't see what they could do about it and she said they could go to her room, that the bed was bigger there and he agreed to go. He remembered now that he was mostly asleep as they rode over and that he had to climb in through the window and he was lucky it was a first floor room like Tino's or he wouldn't have made it.

J.D. realized that the bed he was in now was a bigger bed than his own because it was actually two beds pushed together into one large bed. Once he remembered where he was, he lay back on the pillow and relaxed. Julia wasn't in the bed with him, nor was she in the room. He was alone.

Where was she? If he tried to walk out the front door, he would be caught for sure. He couldn't climb out the window in broad daylight. He had to go to the bathroom. Were the bathrooms down the hall, like they were in his dorm? Or were they in the rooms. Bathrooms in the rooms were shared between two rooms. What if there were someone in the other room?

J.D. slid out of the bed and stood up. Where were his clothes? He didn't see them anywhere. He had to go to the bathroom. He had to go now. Why did she leave him by himself?

J.D. spied an open door to a bathroom over near the door out of the room. Would someone be in the next room?
He decided that he couldn't wait. He walked over and looked inside the door. The bathroom was empty. There was a door to the next room on the other side. What if there were someone there? Then he saw a lock. He could lock the door so no one could get in from the other side. He slipped over to the other door quietly. He listened for a moment, then closed the lock as softly as he could.

After he relieved himself, he crept back into Julia's room and began looking through the closet for his clothes. They were not there, nor were they under the bed nor anywhere that he could see. He decided to get back into the bed and wait for Julia to return.

Someone was at the door, the door to the bathroom. Someone from the other room was trying to get into the bathroom through the door which he had locked.

"I've had it. They'll throw me out of school."

Now whoever it was started pounding on the door.

"Go away," he breathed silently.

"J.D. Open up and let me in." It was Julia's voice.

J.D. sprang out of the bed and opened the door. The next room was not a dorm room with a bed in it as J.D. had expected, but a room more like a living room, with a couch, chairs, tables, and a stereo.

"I thought this was somebody else's room."

"These are both my rooms."

J.D. was relieved to see his clothes strewn about this room.
"I don't remember being in this room."

"You were pretty sleepy when we came in. I nearly had to carry you. I think I hurt my back climbing in through the window."

"How do we get out? I don't want to wait until dark."

"It's visiting hours now. We can walk out the front door."

J.D. put his clothes on hurriedly. He didn't want her looking at him.

"You slept a long time this morning," Julia said.

"I guess I was tired after last night."

"I didn't want to stay in that small bed. I have a bad back."

"I didn't know it would bother you."

"It's OK. Besides, that creepy James guy freaked me out."

"He's all right. He's Tino's roommate."

"What was he doing up there?"

"He likes to sit in out-of-the-way places, where people won't bother him."

Julia put on a record.

"Do you like Dylan?" she asked.

"I play his music all the time."

"So do I. Have you ever heard this album? It's his first album."
She handed J.D. the cover. Dylan was only nineteen. He looked the age, wool coat, black hat with a snap on the brim to hold it up.

"When did this come out?" J.D. asked.

"Sixty-two. You never see it. It's a collector's item."

The stereo spit out the lyrics. Dylan was an angry singer:

I don't know why I love you like I do,
No one else can get along with you.
You're the kind of woman that makes a man lose his brains,
You're the kind of woman that drives a man insane.

The record played on as Julia rolled a joint. When she finished rolling a second, the record was over. She changed records instead of turning it over. The cool mellow sound of a saxophone poured into the room.

"You gotta listen to this, man. Coltrane was the best." She lit the joint and passed it over to him. He took it and sat down in a chair across from her.

"No. Over here, on the couch."

He moved over beside her. They passed the joint back and forth. J.D. began to lose himself in the flow of the saxophone. He leaned back and closed his eyes. The smooth improvisation carried him along.

They finished with one joint and started on another. Julia changed records again. Still jazz but this time the sound of a soft guitar replaced the saxophone.
"Who is this?" J.D. asked.
"Wes Montgomery. You have to listen to this."
"He's fantastic."
"He's pretty good. But not as good as Cory."
"Who's Cory?"
"This guy I used to know. He was a guitar player like you wouldn't believe. His picture's right over there."

Taped to the wall by the door next to the light switch, was a small polaroid picture of a skinny black holding a guitar. He couldn't have been any older than eighteen.

"Is he that good?"
"He's the best. He's even better than Hendrix was."
"That's pretty good."
"He played for Johnny Winters once," Julia said.
"What did Johnny Winters think of him."
"He dug him. He's going to set him up with a recording contract."

"Where did you know this guy from?"
"When I taught school in Houston, his sister was one of my students."

"What did you teach?"
"Government. I came back here to work on my M.A."
"You went to school here before?"
"No. I got my B.A. at U.T. I came up here because my father said he would pay for it if I went someplace close to home. My parents live in Arlington."
"How long did you teach in Houston?"

"Two years. One semester in junior high and a year and a half in high school. I didn't like it, though. Too oppressive. Here, I wrote an article for an underground newspaper about the school system there." She rummaged around in a disorganized stack of papers and pulled out an old copy of Space City News. J.D. was impressed.

"Here it is, right on the front page."

J.D. looked at the article for a moment then put it aside. Julia was pulling out more sheets of paper.

"Here's the outline of a book I'm writing. It's about political oppression."

J.D. looked at these and put them aside.

"I don't think I'll be able to teach in Houston again, but I don't care. I never want to teach another class as long as I live."

"Why? Didn't you like it?"

"The administration was always telling me what to do, and besides, it's all just an attempt to control those kids and tell them what to do. I couldn't stand telling them what to do all the time."

"You ought to read Byron."

"What for?"

"He led two or three revolutions. He surely was opposed to oppression."

"His stuff is boring."
"You don't like poetry?"

"Poetry is just a diversion, like religion. The establishment makes you read it to keep you occupied."

"What should we read instead?" J.D. found himself standing.

"Sit back down. I didn't mean to anger you."

"I'm sorry."

She pulled him back down onto the couch and kissed him.

When J.D. finished getting dressed again, he sat down and waited for Julia to come out of the bedroom. They were going out to get something to eat. J.D. felt warm and relaxed. She came out and sat down beside him. She reached around behind him and rubbed his neck.

"What will you be doing after school is over this summer?"

"I don't know. Go back to San Antonio and get a job maybe."

"You're just going to leave me up here by myself, aren't you."

J.D. was surprised. She wouldn't look at him, but stared at the floor. He hadn't expected her to care. Dreams of a perfect union spun through his mind. It was exactly as he hoped it would be.

"What would you want me to do instead?"

"I don't know. I know I'm in love with you. I need you. You're the sweetest lover I've ever had, and I've had a few."
"But I don't know what to do."

"Listen, I like it in San Antonio. I grew up there. We could rent a house and live there together. We could each get a job. We could spend all our time with each other. What do you think?"

"We could do it. But just for the summer. I mean what about next year? What about school?"

"Who cares about this place. School just messes you up. I was in class last week, talking about my ideas, and there were these two other chicks sitting across the table laughing at me. Laughing at me. Can you believe it? I'm talking about my semester project and these two chicks were laughing. And the professor didn't say anything; he just sat there and didn't say anything."

"If you don't like school then why did you come back?"

"My father made me. Everybody's always trying to make me do something. I'm tired of it. We can live together can't we?"

"I guess we could. I really think we could."

She hugged him tightly around the neck.

They finally got out for something to eat. It was evening on Saturday. They spent that night together and most of the day on Sunday.

"When are your classes?" J.D. asked.

"I don't go to them anymore."
"I guess I'll still go to mine. I haven't decided about school yet."

"You better get an alarm clock, then. I haven't got one."

Monday morning J.D. went to class, but he couldn't concentrate on the lectures. He kept looking around at the other people in the class wondering if their sex lives were as active as his. Did it show on him? He didn't see anything in the faces of the people around him that showed they had a sex life. Nobody looked any different than he usually looked. He must look different. He felt different, more relaxed, more confident. Maybe it would wear off after a while and he wouldn't feel that way anymore. Then he would go back to the way he used to look, like everybody else.

In the afternoon he saw James for the first time since Friday. James said nothing, but smiled wanly.

"Well, Mr. Alfred?" interrupted Dr. Agnew from the front of the classroom.

J.D. didn't hear the question.

"Could you ask me that again?"

"I was merely asking if you were planning to pay attention today, but you've already given me a sufficient answer, thank you."

"Blow it out your ass," he said under his breath. When she turned to write something on the board, he shot the finger at her.
The class droned on monotonously. J.D. tried to figure out all the different ways to play tic-tac-toe so that the 0's would at least tie every time.

After class, J.D. walked home with James.

"What do you think of that girl, Julia?"

James just nodded.

"I mean she's not the best looking girl I've ever met but at least I get along with her pretty well."

James made no reply.

"I mean, what the hell, I deserve to have a girl, right?"

James said nothing.

"Damn right I do. Damn right."

The two of them walked on to the dorm. J.D. continued to talk. James remained silent.
CHAPTER V

That evening J.D. sat in his room playing his guitar and waited. Julia said he would be by to pick him up. There was a meeting to go to, she had said. There was to be a big anti-war rally the weekend after next in Austin.

"This is our chance to show those bastards that we mean business," she said.

Besides, next week was spring break. They had plans to make about what to do while the dorms were closed. If they just happened to end up in Austin at the end of the week that was all right with him, but they had to find a place where they could stay together in the meantime.

As he sat by the window looking down at the street, he thought he saw Julia’s car go by. It looked like her car. Why did she go right on by? Was there somebody there with her? It looked like someone was riding on the passenger side. He couldn’t decide exactly. It might not have even been her. It was probably somebody else.

But it bothered him anyway. At night she would say names in her sleep. She never said his name. Sometimes she said "Danny." Who was this, he would ask. Nobody, she would say. Just somebody she knew. But what was she dreaming? To this she would squeeze her body to his and cry. Why was she crying? Don't ask. Just please don't ask.
He put the guitar down and sat down at his desk. He was far behind in his work. If he wanted to get through the semester he would have to drop a course, maybe two. Would his father keep giving him money if he kept doing so poorly? He didn't know. His parents were fairly open-minded. Perhaps they would give him some money this summer so that he could save what he earned from whatever job he might find. He and Julia could probably stay there this next week. He would have gone there anyway if he hadn't taken up with Julia. They wouldn't mind, his parents. They each had an open mind.

"J.D.!"

Someone was calling from outside the window. It was Julia.

"What are you doing down there?"

"Is it all right to come up?"

"Of course. Come on up."

She was at the door in seconds.

"Where have you been? I thought you'd be here earlier."

"I had some things to do." She wouldn't meet his gaze.

"Are you ready to go, then? If you've been waiting, you're probably anxious to get going," she said.

"I guess I'm ready. Where is this place?"

"You'll see. We'll have to hurry."

They drove to the other side of the campus and stopped at an old and run down apartment house. The place was on the ground floor on the end away from the street. When
they knocked, a tall heavy girl with bad skin let them in.

She led them to a small living room in the back which was filled with people. All the chairs were taken, so they sat on the floor near the door. A man with intense black eyes sat on a couch behind a low table covered with pamphlets and posters about the upcoming demonstration.

"So you see, the real key to a successful rally is planning. If we're really prepared to handle every situation, and contact all the right people, we'll bring it off in a big way."

"Who are we supposed to get in contact with?"

"First of all, you've got to contact all of the radical groups around your campus: the Blacks, the Chicanos, the gays, everybody like that. They all should send somebody down to make sure there's a wide cross section of people who are actively opposed to the war."

The fat girl who let them in sat down next to Julia and started talking to her in a whisper. J.D. tried to lean over and hear what was said but could not.

"How about some of the details, Bucky? If we come down, will we have a place to stay?"

"If you can tell me how many people are coming and what nights you'll be there, I think I could arrange for a place."

Everybody started talking at once, trying to arrive at a number.
"Are we going?" J.D. said to Julia.

"Of course."

"I mean for what days, and all that?"

"The whole week, I guess."

"We could go down to San Antonio a while and stay at my parents' house."

"Would it be cool to stay there?"

"Sure. They wouldn't mind."

The fat girl was writing down names and days.

"Put us down for Friday and Saturday night, Francine," Julia said to her.

"J.D. and Julia for Friday and Saturday."

They had gotten there late. The meeting was already starting to break up. J.D. and Julia moved toward the door. A few people were talking about transportation.

"All four of us want to go together," one guy was saying.

"Why can't they go down separately?" J.D. said. "They'll all see each other down there anyway."

"They're friends," Julia said. "How would you feel if they tried to break us up?"

"But it's not the same thing."

"Why not?"

"We're going together. Come on, you know why."

"They all have feelings for each other, too. They want to be together."

"But it's not the same."
They walked out to the car and drove to her dorm.
"Did you want to stay the whole week at your parents' house?"

"Where else could we go?"

"We could go down and stay at my parents'. If your parents wouldn't mind, I don't think mine would mind either."

"I guess we could do that. We could spend a few days in Arlington, drive down and spend a few days in San Antonio, then drive back up to Austin for next Friday and Saturday and Sunday drive back up here. That would be a pretty good week."

"Yes, that sounds all right."

"Let's go over to my dorm and see what everybody's up to."

"OK."

When they got there, she pulled the car up next to the open window to Tino and James' room. They got out and climbed in. She brought her guitar with her, an old Gibson dreadnought.

"It seems like I never go through the door anymore," J.D. said.

Tino and James were glad to see them. Tino hadn't seen J.D. in nearly a week.

"My man J.D. How's the old life going?"

"I'd have to confess to a great deal of laying around, but besides that it's been all right."

James lay on the top bunk and grinned.

"Just where did you get this bunk bed from, anyway?" J.D. said.
"I brought it with me from South Dakota. It gives us a lot more room to move around in."

"I always wanted one of these when I was a kid."

"When you were a kid?" Julia laughed. "Last year, you mean?"

"I ain't such a kid now, and you ought to know it better than anyone else."

"Why don't you play us something on the guitar, J.D.?" Tino said.

J.D. picked up the guitar and played a Dylan tune:

*Get away from my window*
*Leave at your own chosen speed.*
*You're not the one I want, babe.*
*You're not the one I need.*

Tino laughed heartily and sang along. Julia sat by quietly.

"What are you going to do for spring break, J.D.?"

Tino said.

"Julia and I are going down to her parents' in Arlington, then we're going to San Antonio to my house, then we're going up to Austin for the big anti-war rally that's going to be next weekend. That should keep us occupied."

"I don't know what I'm going to do. I guess I'll drive up home for the week."

The door burst open just then, and John came striding in. He looked surprised to see J.D. and Julia sitting on the bed together.

"Well, my man J.D. I thought you'd run off to join the Foreign Legion. And sweet Julia, too."
"Ho, hooo, big John," Tino cried. He leaped up and gave John a long soul handshake.

"What are you doing that for?" Julia yelled. "Are you trying to make fun of me or what?"

J.D. tried to get her to sit back down.

"Nobody's making fun of you," he said. "What made you think they were?"

She looked at J.D., then at Tino and John. She sat back down and stared at the floor.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it."

"You don't have to be sorry. Nobody was making fun of you. Everything's cool."

"We didn't mean anything," Tino said.

"Maybe you could stay somewhere around here and go to the rally next week, Tino," J.D. said after a long silence, trying to break the mood.

"Maybe, except that I don't know of anywhere to stay."

"Are you talking about the big anti-war rally that's a week from Saturday?" John said. "I'm going down for that. My brother lives in Austin. He has a big house. Maybe he'll let you stay there the week."

"Are you sure it would be all right?"

"Sure, he's a cool cat, a dope dealer, man. You couldn't find a nicer place to spend a vacation."

"That would be far out! How about you, James. You want to go to Austin for the rally?"
James looked up and grinned. He nodded his head.
"We may have to sleep on the floor in the living room but I'm sure it would be all right," John said.
"Then it's agreed. We meet in Austin for the rally."
"You'll have to give me this guy's address," J.D. said.
"You're not coming down with us?" John said.
"No, we're going to Arlington and then to San Antonio to visit our parents."
John smiled broadly. "You'll like Julia's parents," he said expansively.
"I'm sure I will."
John wrote down the address.
"We'll see you there next Thursday or Friday," J.D. said.
"I'm sure you will," John said. He winked at Julia. She stared at the floor.
"Anybody want to buy some grass?" John said.
Julia looked up. "You could sell me a lid."
"For the usual price."
She pulled a ten dollar bill out of her pocket.
"It's down the hall in my room. Come on, I'll get it for you."
Julia got up and followed him out. J.D. started to get up, too, but she pressed him back down.
"This will only take a minute. I'll be right back."
J.D. sat back down and Julia left with John.
"Why did she get so pissed off about that handshake?" Tino said.

"I don't know," J.D. said. "She always thinks people are making fun of her."

"You're getting something off of her, aren't you?"

"Leave it be, my man."

"You don't have to get sore."

"I'm not sore. I just don't want to talk about it."

"OK, OK, we won't talk about it. You didn't have to get sore."

"It's all right. I just think it's personal, that's all."

"OK, OK, OK. We'll leave it alone."

Julia came back in but she didn't sit down.

"Let's get out of here," she said. She went and climbed out the window.

J.D. got up to follow her.

"I'll see you later, Tino, James," he said. "It looks like she's still pissed off."

"Goodbye, J.D.," Tino said.

J.D. climbed out the window and got in the car, putting the guitar in the back seat. Before pulling away, J.D. looked back up through the window. He could see James lying on the top bunk in the upper darkness of the room, with the light from the headlights reflecting off his glasses.
"What were you pissed off about back there?" J.D. said as quietly as he could.

"Oh, nothing really. I just don't like that guy making fun of me all the time."

"Which guy? You mean John? How was he making fun of you?"

"Oh, he's making fun of me because I used to teach at a Black high school in Houston. I used to know a lot of Blacks."

"I'm sure he didn't mean anything."

"You're probably right."

They pulled up in front of her dorm.

"Do you think it's late enough?"

"Who cares? They'd be doing us a favor if they threw us out of this place."

"I wish your room was as easy to get into as Tino's room is, right by the parking lot like it is."

"Why don't you just walk in the side door with me? Nobody will see you, and even if they did they wouldn't care."

"I'll try the window, anyway."

"Have it any way you want."

Once inside the bedroom, J.D. lay down on the bed with his clothes on. Julia sat down next to him and rubbed his neck.

He pulled her down next to him.

"Julia."
"Not yet. I'm not quite ready yet."

He probed onward.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm just a little tired. Wait a minute. Maybe in a minute."

He gave up and rose from the bed. He sat and looked out the window at a streetlamp.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Why didn't you want to? You've always wanted to before."

"I did want to. You just wouldn't take your pants off."

J.D. covered his face with his hands.

"Come on, now. It's not as bad as that. Stop that and get into bed. Come on."

J.D. got undressed and got into bed.

"You won't do that again, will you?"

"Do what?"

"It's very important to me. I love you very much."

"Of course I won't. I was just a little tired tonight."

"I want you to be near me all the time."

"We're together now, aren't we?"

"Yes. But I worry sometimes."

"You don't have to worry. Everything is all right."

"You'll like my parents. They're very nice people."

"I'm sure I will."

"Wait till we get down there. We'll have a good time."

"I'm sure we will."
"You know that place we went to tonight?"
"What about it?"
"You know that girl Francine, the fat one?"
"Don't call her that."
"Call her what?"
"You know, fat."
"But she is."
"Never mind about that. You have to be nice to her."
"I didn't mean anything."
"She's not pretty, and she has to make up for it."
"I didn't mean anything. I was just wondering why she was involved with this anti-war business."
"She has to have a cause."
"What for?"
"Like I was saying, she's not pretty, so she has to make up for it. She has to get involved and feel important. That's the way it always is with ugly girls. If they want anything they have to go out of their way to get it."
"I don't believe that."
"It's true. Look at me."
"I don't think you're ugly."
"I'm not pretty and I know it."
"You're not ugly at all."
"I have to sleep with every guy that comes along or I wouldn't have any friends at all. That's the way it is with ugly chicks. Would you be here if we weren't getting it on?"
"Of course I would."
"You probably wouldn't."
"I would."
"All you really care about is sex. You don't really care about me."
"I love you."
"Maybe so."
"I do."
"Maybe you do. But you wouldn't have thought twice about me if I hadn't slept with you."
"I did. I thought about you a lot before we slept together."
"That's not what David said."
"What does he know."
"He said that you said once that you wouldn't mind screwing me. 'Wouldn't mind,' not 'wanted to.'"
"That's the way guys talk when they're together. I wouldn't pay any attention to him."
"What am I supposed to pay attention to?"
"Pay attention to me."
"You're always trying to tell me what to do."
"I'm not telling you what to do. I'm just trying to get you to trust me."
"I do trust you. Never mind anything I said. I didn't mean any of it."
"It's OK. Don't think about it."
"I always mess everything up."

"Let's go to sleep. I think we're both just tired."

"I want us to stay together. I don't want to lose you."

"You're not going to lose me. I'm not going anywhere."

"I'm just so tired of being alone."

"I'm right here. Don't worry."

"I just don't want to be alone."
The week passed and J.D. learned that New York and David were also going to Austin. The whole gang would be there. J.D. skipped class most of the week, but did go to his English class on Friday. When he got there, James came over and sat down beside him.

"Are you ready to go to Austin?"
James nodded.

"I got all my stuff together and put it in the trunk of Julia's car. She was mad about something this morning. She said someone at the next table at the cafeteria was making fun of her, but she wouldn't tell me what they were doing."

James nodded attentively.

"I hope she lets me do the driving. She's stoned all the time."

Dr. Agnew entered the room. James watched her as she put her books on the front desk and erased the board.

"I hate this class. I don't think I'll come back to it after today. I might just drop out of school altogether."
James said nothing.

"Now, Mr. Alfred. Did you bother to read the assignment?"

Julia was waiting for him after class.
"What took you so long? You said it wouldn't take that long," she said.

"I had to tell that old bitch off once and for all."

"She probably just got tired of putting up with all these young studs giving her a hard time."

"She gave me a hard time, that's for sure."

James had followed J.D. out of the building and now stood beside him.

"What did you say to her?" Julia asked.

"Well, she had been giving me a hard time all semester because she didn't like the way I interpreted things. Every time we talked about a poem she liked, I said it was a lousy poem. She'd get mad and ask me why I insisted on interrupting the class. I told her I had a right to an opinion the same as her. If I thought it wasn't such a great poem, then I had a right to say so."

"She probably didn't like that too well."

"But I really got her today. After class I went right up to her before anyone had a chance to leave. I told her she gave me a hard time because she hated men and the reason she hated men was because none of them would ever lay a finger on her. She wants it really bad but none of us would give it to her so now she's taking it out on me as revenge."

"She probably doesn't like you because you act like an ass hole."

"I don't act like an ass hole."
"If you acted that way in a class I was teaching I'd kick you right out on your ass."
"She deserved it, though. She gave me a lot of shit."
"Come on. Let's go."
J.D. turned to James.
"Well, I guess I'll see you in Austin," J.D. said.
James nodded his head and grinned.
"Take care of yourself, James."
They shook hands. Julia began to walk away. J.D. ran to catch up with her.
"Do your parents have a big house?"
"It's a nice size house."
"I mean will their bedroom be close to our rooms?"
"Pretty close. Why?"
"So I can sneak over there at night."
"Their room is right across the hall from the rooms we'll be in."
"That's too bad."
"All you ever think about is sex."
"What's wrong with that?"
"I wish you'd think about something else for a change."
"I think about other things."
They reached the car. Julia got in on the driver's side.
"Why don't you let me drive?"
"I can drive all right. It's my car."
"All right. If you want to drive, go ahead."
"Why did you want to drive, anyway?"
"I just wanted to drive, that's all."
J.D. got in the car and stared out the window. He pressed himself against the passenger door and fell silent.

It took nearly an hour to reach Julia's parents' house. Once they were out in the country on the open road, Julia brought out a joint and lit it. She offered it to J.D., but he just stared out the window. After a while she reached over and touched him on the thigh. J.D. turned to look at her. She was smiling. He slid over in the seat and put his arm around her.

"What were you mad about?"
"I wasn't mad about anything."
"You've been bitching at me all day."
"Is that what you think I am, a bitch?"
"I didn't say you were a bitch."
"You did so. You asked me why I was bitching at you."
"That's just a figure of speech."
"That's all you ever use. Figures of speech. Your whole mind is clogged up with clichés."
"I don't use that many clichés."
"You may not say them, but you think them."
J.D. slid back over by the door.
"Hey, come on. I didn't mean anything. I don't want you to be mad at me. Slide back over here beside me."
J.D. moved back over beside her.

"Listen. I love you," she said. "I really do. I don't want you to be mad at me. I don't want to be alone. It's just what those damn bitches were doing this morning. Don't mind me. I'll be all right in a little while."

"I'm not going anywhere. I'll always be here. Wherever you want to go is all right with me. I'll follow you wherever you want."

"Like, I can't tell you what to do."

"I do what I want when I want to do it. If I want to stay with you, then that's what I'll do."

"You'll get tired of me," she said.

"How do you know?"

"You'll get tired of me. I just know."

"It'll work out."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes."

"I hope you're right."

"I'm right. I know I'm right."

"I hope you're right."

When they arrived at the house of Julia's parents, it was almost five in the afternoon. A car was parked in the driveway. The house was average size, with a well kept lawn and a two-car garage. The houses were all the same--one story brick, only a few years old. Julia pulled into the driveway beside the other car.
"That's my mother's car. She teaches at an elementary school. The first grade, I think."

"What about your father?"

"He runs a book store. He won't be home for an hour or so, I think."

"They both work all day?"

"Yes."

"Good. Then we'll have the house to ourselves all day."

She looked at him and frowned. Then she leaned over and kissed him full on the mouth.

"We'll go for a ride in the car later on. I'll show you where David lives. It's not far from here."

"He's sort of a strange guy."

"He thinks he's a musician."

"He's not one?"

"Not a real musician. You'll see what I mean."

"Why don't we go inside?"

"I want to tell you about my mother first."

"What do I have to know?"

"First of all, don't tell her you're a freshman. And don't tell her you're only seventeen. That would freak her out completely."

"What should I tell her?"

"Tell her you're at least a junior, and that you're twenty. That's old enough for her."

"OK. I'm a twenty year old junior. Anything else?"
"If she offers you something to eat, don't turn it down. She'll think there's something wrong with you if you do."

"OK. What else?"

"That's about it. Oh, and don't touch me while they're around. It would freak them out completely."

"No touching? Don't they think you're old enough by now?"

"They know I'm old enough. It just freaks them out. You know how parents are."

"I guess I don't know. My parents aren't really like that."

"They are. Just wait and see. They're exactly like that."

"I guess I'll find out. But I don't really think they'll mind."

"It's different with a girl than with a boy. Girls are supposed to be such perfect and precious little darlings. Boys are free to do whatever they want."

Julia got out of the car and went around to the trunk. She lifted out a basket full of clothes.

"Get your stuff and we'll go inside."

J.D. picked up his small bag and followed her into the house through the garage. The door from the garage led into a utility room with a washer and dryer. Julia set the basket of clothes down beside the washer and motioned for him to do the same with his bag.
"Momma, I'm home."

A tall thin woman with light brown hair which was starting to turn gray met them as they entered the kitchen from the utility room.

"Why, it's so nice to have you home, Julia, even if only for a few days." She touched her cheek lightly to Julia's.

"Momma, this is the boy I was telling you about. J.D. this is my mother."

J.D. nodded his head uneasily.

"Have you all eaten, Julia? I was going to fix supper for your Daddy."

"We haven't had anything yet."

"I'm frying some chicken, J.D. Would you like to have some?"

"No thanks. I'm not very hungry."

The four of them sat around the dinner table without speaking. Julia's father moved slowly as he ate. There was more than enough food, but J.D. did not eat much.

"So you're a junior, J.D.," Julia's father said. "Tell me, what are you majoring in?"

"I was going to major in political science, but I changed to English last year."

"Julia was a political science major."

"She made a good name for herself at U.T."

Julia stopped eating and stared at her plate.
"Well Julia, if you don't like graduate school, you could always get a job teaching anywhere you want."

"I told you, Momma, I don't like teaching. I don't like telling those kids what to do."

"Why that's ridiculous and you know it."

"Besides, they would ask me if I ever taught before. As soon as they check my references, they would never want to hire me."

"You quit worrying about that. That's not in your record. That was only a vicious rumor, as far as Mistah Binford was concerned."

"He wasn't as nice as you thought. He was always trying to get me to quit. He would have fired me for that if I hadn't."

"Don't be silly. He would never have fired you just on the basis of a rumor, especially one like that."

"It doesn't really matter. I'm never going to teach again."

Julia's father had said nothing. He slowly rose and left the room.

"Your father has not been feeling well lately. I think he needs to take a vacation."

"So why doesn't he just take one," Julia said viciously. "You know he has to take care of the shop."

"He has people working for him. He could take off any time he wanted to."
"He works hard in that shop. He just isn't convinced things would run right if he wasn't there."
"Why doesn't he just quit working there if he doesn't like it."
"You know perfectly well that he loves that job."
"He loves it all right. He wouldn't leave it to save his own life."
"You know perfectly well that all your money comes from that shop. Where would you be right now if it weren't for the money he gives you?"
"I would have starved to death."
"J.D., just what do you think about a girl who doesn't even appreciate the sacrifices her father makes for her."
J.D. glanced over at Julia. She stared at her plate.
"I don't really know."
Julia looked up at him sharply.
"I suppose you agree with her."
"Of course he does. I bet you treat your parents well, don't you dear?"
"Momma, leave him alone."
"I'm not bothering him. I'm not bothering you, am I dear? We're just having a quiet little conversation."
Julia jumped to her feet.
"Momma, just leave me alone! Leave me alone!"
Julia's mother looked up at Julia calmly.
"I don't know where you learned you manners, young lady. You certainly never saw me making a scene like this."

Julia picked up her glass, still half full of milk, and threw it at the wall. Then she reached for her plate, but J.D. grabbed her by the wrists.

"Let go of me. Let go, let go."

She struggled against J.D.'s grip for a moment then collapsed against him. J.D. tried to put his arms around her but she pushed him away suddenly and ran from the room out of the house through the garage. J.D. looked over at Julia's mother. She looked back calmly.

"Are you going to go after her?"

"Yes. I guess so."

"Yes, you are. They all do."

J.D. found Julia sitting in the car. Her head was pressed against the steering wheel. J.D. leaned in the window and touched her arm.

"Get in. We're going for a ride."

J.D. got in and tried to put his arm around her. She pushed his hands away and started the car. She drove away savagely.

"Julia."

"She does that every time. Ever since it happened."

"Ever since what happened?"

"Ever since it happened, she won't leave me alone."
"Ever since what happened?"

"And she doesn't do it to me directly. She uses other people to do it."

"Do what?"

"Don't you feel used? She used you to get at me."

"Get at you for what?"

"I don't know why she does it. She even did it to me when I was a little girl."

"Did what?"

"She never leaves me alone."

"Watch where you're going."

Julia swerved to just barely miss a car coming from the other way.

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to David's house."

"David? Here?"

"I know him from here. That's why he goes to North Texas. He followed me up there."

"He goes to North Texas just because you do?"

"That's the only reason. He didn't even graduate from high school."

Julia stopped in front of a large house set well back from the road. She got out of the car quickly and started up the walk. J.D. had to run to keep up.

David answered the door. He did not look surprised. He took them upstairs to a room with a black light and a water
bed. David put a record on the stereo. Music flowed from all four corners of the room. Julia lay down on the bed and closed her eyes. David drew J.D. aside.

"It's no use trying to talk to her. I've seen her in this mood before. You can't bring her out of it. You have to wait until she's ready to talk."

"I've never seen her like that."

"Leave her alone. She'll be all right after a while."

David led J.D. to another room on the same floor. Leather furniture and a thick fur rug sat to one side in front of a cold fireplace.

"We ought to build a fire," J.D. said.

"The weather's too warm. We don't need it now."

"That's so."

They sat down on a leather sofa.

"When she gets into moods like that, you just have to leave her alone until she comes around."

"How long will it take, you think?"

"Who knows? Maybe an hour. Maybe a week."

"You know Julia pretty well."

"It all comes from experience."

"Experience. I've only known her a couple of weeks."

"I've known her for about a year now. I think that's a record. She doesn't have any of the same friends she had when I met her."

"Did she move or something?"
"Oh, nothing like that. She just goes through friends quickly. She uses them up and tosses them aside."

"Wait a minute. What kind of friends are you talking about?"

"Any kind of friend. Friends, guys, girls. Any kind of friend."

"You mean like guys she's going with?"

"Any kind of guy. She must have gone with fifteen different guys last year. And those are only the ones she tells me about. I imagine there are others around which she hasn't even mentioned."

"Fifteen different guys in one year?"

"At least."

"How could anyone handle that many?"

"You're underestimating her. She doesn't stay with any one guy for very long."

"Like how long?"

"Like maybe a week. Maybe two."

"We've been together a week."

"You're doing pretty well. She hasn't said anything about breaking up."

"No, she hasn't."

"I mean to me."

"Why would she tell you something like that?"

"Because she trusts me."

"How did you get her to trust you? I can't get her to trust me. And we sleep together every night."
"She trusts me because she's known me for so long. She knows that no matter what she does, it's all right with me."

"Just because she knows you. Is she really that hard to get along with?"

"You're the one whose been sleeping with her all week," David said. "You tell me."

"She's really not that hard to get along with."

"Oh. I suppose she's never accused you of hanging around her just to get an easy piece of ass."

"No, she hasn't done that."

"Well that's what she thinks, even if she hasn't said so. And I suppose she didn't get into an argument with you over the fact that she's ugly."

"She's not ugly."

"But you have argued about that."

"She's not ugly."

"Maybe not. But she thinks so."

"She's not ugly."

"All right, all right, she's not. But she thinks so. And she thinks you think so too. She's surely argued with you about it."

"Maybe she has. How do you know all this?"

"She trusts me. She tells me everything. Besides, I went through all this myself."

"You went with her too?"

"Sure. A year ago."
"How long did that last?"

"About a week. I saw which way it was going, so I broke it off."

"You broke it off? Then why do you still follow her around all over the place? Why does she still hang around with you?"

"I don't follow her around anywhere."

"Yes you do. I used to see you with her all the time."

"She was following me around."

"She said you followed her up to North Texas."

"That's not exactly true."

"That's what she said."

"That may be what she told you, but that's not the way it happened."

"That's what she told me."

"I didn't exactly follow her."

"Then why did you go there? She said you hadn't even graduated yet."

"It's true I never graduated, and it's true that I went up there because of her, but I didn't follow her."

"Then why did you go?"

"She begged me to go."

"Begged? I don't believe she would beg."

"Hasn't she ever begged you for anything?"

"No."

"She begs for people to stay with her all the time."
"She's never begged me."

"Well, that's what she did. She begged me to cut short high school and go up to North Texas to be with her."

"But why would she do a thing like that?"

"Because she doesn't want to be alone."

J.D. stared into the cold fireplace.

"I guess you know quite a bit about her by now."

"Sure. I know all about her."

"Even from before you knew her?"

"She's told me quite a bit," David said.

"This afternoon before we came over here, in fact the reason that we came over here is that Julia had a fight with her mother. Not a fight really. Her mother was goading her about something, something that happened where she used to teach school. I couldn't tell what they were talking about. Julia wouldn't tell me. Something that happened which forced her to quit teaching."

"Oh that. Yes, I know what you're talking about."

"What happened? And why did her mother give her such a hard time about it?"

"Well, that's a long story. You see, when Julia used to teach school in Houston, she didn't exactly lead the life of a nun."

"This is what she told you?"

"Sure. Her and her mother."

"Her mother told you that?"
"Sure. She was trying to scare me away."

"What for?"

"How should I know? She does it to every guy that Julia brings over to the house."

"She was trying to scare me away?"

"Sure. That's why she kept bringing it up."

"Just to scare me."

"Let me get on with the story. Anyway, she liked to make it with a lot of guys. She likes to keep active. And since they were around a lot, she starting making it with a few of her students."

"The students she was teaching? You mean high school students?" J.D. asked.

"Why should that surprise you? Those kids are the same age as us. If they were seniors they might have even been older than us."

"Yeah, but we're not her students."

"That's so. Any way, after she'd made it with a few of these guys, the word got out. Guys used to come over to her apartment four and five at a time."

"She made it with four or five guys at a time?"

"No, no, she never did that. That was too much even for her. She wouldn't let that many guys in when they came all at once. But the word got around. Everybody knew what was going on."

"So what finally happened? Did she just quit?"
"No, it wasn't as simple as that. There was this one kid, this kid named Danny. I guess he thought he was something special to her. One night she was making it with this guitar player named Cory when Danny shows up at the front door. Now Danny's pissed off because Cory's there. She tries to stop him but there's nothing she can do. They're both too big for her. I mean she really doesn't want anything to happen to either one of them. But Danny thought he had her all locked up for himself. He thought she wasn't doing it with anybody else. He thought she had quit running around with all these other guys and had settled down with him."

"So what did he do to Cory?"

"Like I said, he thought Julia was his chick. He really got pissed off when he found Cory there."

"So what did he do?"

"They started fighting in the bedroom. Julia tried to stop them but they just pushed her aside. Danny pulled a knife and slashed Cory across the face with it. Cory fell on the floor. He couldn't see. Danny kicked him in the head and knocked him out. Julia tried to stop him but she couldn't. He was just too big for her."

"What did he do? Why was she trying to stop him?"

"He cut him with the knife."

"You told me that."

"He cut him again after knocking him out. Only this time he cut him to make sure."
"Make sure of what? What are you telling me? Make sure
of what?"

"He made sure that he could never mess around with
Julia again."

"You mean he killed him?"

"No, he didn't kill Cory. Cory's still alive today."

"Then what did he do?"

David leered at him, half smiling. "He cut his balls
off."

"Right in front of her? He did it right where she
could see him do it?"

"That's right. Right in front of her eyes. She screamed
at him to get out, but he wouldn't leave. He just stood there
laughing, waving that bloody knife in front of her face."

"She's never said anything about any of this."

"Like I said, she doesn't trust you."

"How did she get out of it?"

"Well, like I said, Danny wouldn't leave. He just kept
standing there waving that knife around. Finally she picked
up a lamp and hit him over the head with it. They were both
out cold on the floor. She didn't know what to do with either
one of them."

"I'd have got out of there fast."

"She didn't get out. She called a friend of hers. This
friend came over and helped her drag the both of them out to
her car. They drove a couple of miles and tossed Danny out
in an alley. She was beginning to get worried because he hadn't come around. She didn't want to dump him like that, but her friend said it was the best thing to do. Then they took Cory to the hospital."

"Didn't the people at the hospital want to know how he got hurt."

"They called the police, but by that time Julia and this friend of hers disappeared."

"This is all a little hard to believe."

"Believe it if you want to. That's the way she told it to me."

"She's never said anything about it to me."

"Like I said before. She doesn't trust you."

"What happened to these guys? Cory must have told the police what happened once he came to."

"He didn't say anything. I guess he just didn't like cops or something. But Danny never made it any secret. He let everybody know what would happen if they started messing with his chick."

"And that's the end of it? Julia quit that teaching job and came up here?"

"No. Not quite."

"Go ahead," J.D. whispered.

"Well, it seems a couple of weeks later Danny disappeared. Nobody knew what happened to him. The cops arrested Cory, but they didn't hold him very long. There was no evidence. They weren't even sure that anything had happened to Danny."
"Didn't Julia ever say anything."

"No, but the word got around. It was no secret. Even the principal heard about it. She quit that job right after the year was over. It was just about over when all of this happened, anyway."

"When was this?"

"Just about a year ago, now. A year ago June."

"This explains a lot of things."

"Don't tell her that you know about all of this. I don't want her to know I told you about it."

"Why did you tell me?"

"I just thought you'd be better off if you knew."

"It sure answers a lot of questions."

"Don't let all of this discourage you."

"Discourage me how?"

"From staying with Julia."

"It's done a pretty good job."

"Listen, she likes you more than most of the guys she's been with this last year. She told me so herself. She's been with a lot of guys, but she said she hopes she can stay with you. She told me that. She really means it."

"Has she ever said anything like that before?"

"No, not so I believed her."

"Then she has said that before."

"Whenever she said it before she took it back right away. This time she didn't. I think she means it this time."
"You really do."

"Yeah, I really do."

"Then I guess I have nothing to worry about."

"Well, not exactly."

"You mean some crazy guy might bust in the room some night with a sharp knife?"

"No, no. Nothing like that."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, you have to understand Julia. She's sort of a funny chick."

"I got that figured out already."

"She's got some weird friends, sure. But she's funny in another way."

"What's that."

"She can't accept happiness. If everything's going along great, she thinks there's something wrong. And once she's got that idea in her mind, you can't change it."

"You're right. That is pretty strange."

"It's true, though. If everything's going along perfect then she gets depressed and screws it up somehow."

"I better watch out then."

"That's what I mean. You'd better be sure to look out for that."

"I will."

"Let's go back to the other room. She's probably cooled off by now."
They got up and walked down the hall to the room where they had left Julia. She was asleep on the bed.

"Don't disturb her. I'll let you stay here until she wakes up. Stay the night if you want. Just remember: I never told you any of this."

J.D. nodded and David left. He looked at Julia as she slept. She looked more calm in sleep than he ever remembered her. He reached out and stroked her cheek. A smile came across her face slowly.
CHAPTER VII

Julia stirred and sat up.
"What time is it?" she said.
"About nine, I think."
"Let's go home. Momma expects me to stay home tonight."
They said goodbye to David at the front door.
"We'll see you tomorrow."
"I'm leaving for Austin early. I'll see you when you get there."
"We'll be there on Friday."
"Goodbye."

Julia leaned on J.D.'s arm as they walked out to the car.
"What are you thinking about?"
"Nothing. I'm not thinking about anything."
"You're very quiet."
"Why shouldn't I be? It's a very nice night."
"Why don't you drive home."
They got into the car and J.D. started the engine.
"Where did you go?"
"When?"
"When we got here. You went somewhere with David."
"We went to a room with a fireplace. We talked."
"What did you talk about?"
"Oh, nothing really. This weekend. Music."
"You were talking about me."
"We talked about you some."
"What did he tell you?"
"Nothing much. Mostly we talked about Austin."
"Did he tell you about the Mafia?"
"No. He didn't mention it."
"That's hard to believe."
"Why's that?"
"He talks about it all the time. I think maybe he works for the Mafia sometimes."
"Why do you think that? Is that what he said?"
"No, he's never said that himself. He likes to be mysterious about it."
"What does he do for the Mafia, exactly?"
"I don't know exactly. He never says."
"Then why do you think he does anything?"
"He talks about it all the time. All I ever hear about is Mafia this and Mafia that. He wouldn't know so much if he wasn't working for them."
"What does he know?"
"You know, dope, gambling, prostitutes. That kind of stuff."
"Prostitutes, huh. I'll have to talk with him again."
"You can talk to me. He tried to get me to do it once."
"You? What for?"
"He said I could make a lot of money. He said there were guys, businessmen with a lot of money, who had weird tastes that he could fix me up with. He said I could make three hundred dollars a night."

"What did you say to that?"

"I told him I'd think about it. I don't know if I'll do it or not. That's a lot of money for one night's work."

"That is a lot of money. You wouldn't have to work but about two or three nights a week."

"I can't believe he didn't mention the Mafia though. He talks about it all the time."

"He didn't say a word."

"It's hard to believe."

J.D. parked the car in the street in front of Julia's parents' house. The lights were still on.

"What time will they go to bed?"

"Pretty soon. Momma usually stays up for the news, but Poppa goes to bed early. He gets up at five o'clock."

"Do you want to go inside?"

"Not yet. Let's stay out here for a while."

J.D. and Julia lay in the bed quietly. Julia's parents had left for work early that morning and Julia had come to J.D.'s room before he woke up. When he did awaken, she was at his side sleeping. A frown was on her face. She began to twitch and cry out in her sleep. J.D. woke her and cradled her head in the crook of his arm.
"What an awful dream."
"Tell me about it."
"No. It's not important."
"OK. It's not important."
"Come on. I want to show you something."

Julia got up from the bed and put on a robe. J.D. put on a pair of jeans and a shirt and followed into the living room. Against one wall was an organ and against another was a piano. Julia sat down and began playing the organ. J.D. vaguely recognized the hymn.

Julia leaned back when she played and closed her eyes. Occasionally she would throw her head back and sway from side to side with the music. When she finished she sat quite still.

"Do you like that kind of song?"
"If I don't have my music, then I don't have anything."

J.D. sat down in a chair in the corner.
"Come over here and sit."

J.D. got up and sat on the bench beside her.
"I'll show you how to play. See these pedals? These are the low notes. See?"

J.D. touched one of the pedals with his foot.
"I'll show you how to make a chord. Put your hands like this. Put your foot here. See how easy it is?"

"Yes. But what if you wanted to play a different chord?"
"You just move your hands."
"But what about your feet?"
"You move them too."
"At the same time?"
"Yes at the same time."
"How do you know you're going to press the right pedals?"
"The pedals are the same as the keyboard. See? The regular notes are down here and the sharps and flats are up here."
"How do you know if you're going to press the right one?"
"You just know."
"Don't you have to look?"
"You can look if you want to."
"Then how do you watch what keys your fingers are pressing?"
"You don't have to look. I play with my eyes shut."
She threw back her head and began to play again with her eyes closed.
"Julia."
"Hey, don't ever stop me while I'm playing."
"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to."
"It's not something you should be doing. If you were a real musician, you wouldn't stop somebody who was playing."
"I'm sorry. I just wanted to ask you how long it took you before you were able to do that."
"You should have waited until I was done."
"I'm sorry. I just wanted to know."
"I'd have told you after."
"I'm sorry, all right."

"You think all you have to do is apologize and everything will be all right. Well you better start thinking. You better be more careful."

Julia jumped up from the bench and ran from the room down the hall to her bedroom. She slammed the door behind her.
CHAPTER VIII

J.D. made his way through the house back to Julia's door. He listened for a moment before knocking. He could hear her rummaging through the closet.

"Julia."
No answer.
"Julia?"
"What do you want?"
"Can I come in?"
"Do whatever you want."
J.D. opened the door silently.
"Are you sure it's all right?"
"Sure. Do whatever you want."
J.D. stepped inside the door.
"Are you mad at me?"
"No, I'm not mad. Come here, I want to show you something."

Julia was sitting on the floor in front of the closet. Spread in front of her on the floor were several photo albums. She held one in her hands open to a picture of herself and a young Black. They were grinning into the camera with their arms around each other's necks. J.D. sat down on the floor beside her.
Julia began to flip through the album. Then she closed it and picked up and opened another. The second album contained many pictures of Julia—a high school graduation picture, a college graduation picture, portraits of her at various ages. She pointed to one of the pictures.

"This is when I was sixteen years old. We lived in Dallas then."

J.D. nodded and said nothing.

"I was young and stupid then. I was only sixteen."

She laid the book aside still open to the picture. She picked up the book she had held at first and opened it again. She found a picture of herself sitting in front of a fireplace. A large fire was burning and a small blond man sat at her side looking at her and smiling.

"This was my fiancé," she said, pointing to the man. "I was only eighteen when we became engaged. He was the first man I ever made love to. Boy was I ready. I don't know why I waited so long. But once I started I never stopped."

"Whatever happened to him?"

"We broke up eventually. It was for the best."

Julia turned the page back to the picture of herself with her arm around the young Black.

"This is Albert. I was in love with this boy."

"Where did you know him from?" J.D. asked.

"He was one of my students down in Houston."

"One of the students in your own class?"
"Sure. Why so surprised? He's older than you are. Besides, just because he was in one of my classes doesn't mean he's not a human being."

"No, I suppose not."

"People always put me down because I fell in love with one of my students. They don't realize that any two human beings can fall in love. It doesn't matter if they just happen to be a student and a teacher."

"It's almost like incest."

"It's not incest. And besides, what's wrong with incest? It's just a lot of religious mumbo jumbo to make people feel guilty, to scare them and keep them under the control of the government. So what if people are related? If it's real love, what does it matter?"

"You're right." J.D. said. "You know, Byron fell in love with his own sister. Everybody got so upset about it that they ran him right out of the country."

"They ran him off because they didn't want to lose control. The government didn't want him to become too popular. He was only doing what everybody would have done if they could. Sleep with whoever they wanted to. That's all I wanted to do. It was during my off hours. It was just me and him. What I did and what I do with my private life is my business and nobody else's. I don't care what any school principal says or anybody's mother or my mother or you or anybody. I'll do whatever I want when I want to do it."
"I never try to stop you from doing anything."

"Maybe not now. But you will someday. You're going to tell me what to do and I won't be able to do it."

"I'll never do that."

"Maybe not. I don't care. Never mind me. I'm just upset."

"About the organ? I'm sorry if I didn't do quite what you wanted. I couldn't get the hang of it right away."

"You will if you practice. If you have the soul of a musician. I think you do. I didn't mean it when I said that you didn't. I know David doesn't. The only reason he plays an instrument is to get girls to sleep with him. When you started to play around and make fun of the organ I thought you were doing the same thing just to get me into bed with you."

"I wasn't doing that. I was just trying to enjoy myself."

"It's OK. I just think sometimes that you wouldn't be here at all except for the sex."

"I love you as a person. Not just for sex. We do a lot of things besides just have sex. Besides when we have sex we make love. There's a big difference."

Julia smiled and put her arm around J.D.'s shoulder.

"Of course. You're right. Let me show some more pictures. I haven't looked at some of these in years. It will be fun."

"Show me whatever you want. I'm glad you're all right."

Julia flipped through the pages and stopped at a picture of a young Black playing the guitar. J.D. thought that he looked familiar.
"This is a picture of Cory," Julia said. "You remember, there's a picture of him up in my room in Denton."

"Of course," J.D. said. "He looks different somehow."

"This is a much newer picture. That other is almost a year older. I remember when I first met Cory. I went over to this friend of mine's house. He was a student of mine too. But he was still a friend. There was a guitar there, just sitting there. A bunch of people where there but I just picked it up and started to play. I was really cooking that day. I never played so well in my life. There was one cat there who came up and sat down and wouldn't take his eyes off me. He was really digging it. We were both getting into it so deep that I didn't want to stop. Finally I did, though, and when I put the guitar down he picked it up and I swear I never heard anyone play the guitar as well as he did, not even on a record. But he just sat there and dug on me until I was done and then he played until I couldn't stand it anymore. I fell in love with that guy right then."

"And you went home with him?"

"No, not right away. After he was through playing he packed up his guitar and left. A guy came up to me after he was gone and told me that he never let anybody play or even touch his guitar before. I not only touched it, I played it. And he didn't try to stop me. He just sat there digging it. I played for him, then he played for me. He was the first person I ever met who had the soul of a musician. I've met a few since then, but nobody like him."
"Why didn't you stay together?" J.D. asked.

"I don't know. It never worked out. But when he played, I didn't care. I just didn't care."

"Whatever happened to him?"

"He lives down in Houston. He called me last week."

"What for?"

"That's just how Cory is. I won't hear from him for a long time and all of a sudden he'll call me on the phone."

"He just wants to talk sometimes," J.D. said.

"That's right. Sometimes he just wants to talk."

"Do you hear from a lot of the people you knew from down there?"

"Not too much anymore. Once I left, they just sort of forgot about me."

"I can't see why. You're not easy to forget."

"You'll forget about me yourself someday, just as soon as you get tired of me."

"Why do you think I'll get tired of you? You keep saying I'll get tired of you."

"You'll be just like all the rest. Once you get what you want you'll be moving on."

"Then what do I want? If you know so much, what exactly do I want?"

"Sex. Or attention. Or something to control."

"I don't want to control you."

"Yes you do. That's how men are. They want to control everything around them."
"I don't care if things don't always go the way I want."
"Yes you do. Men want to run everything in the world."
"I don't care one way or the other."
"You don't care, do you. You just want to sit at home and fuck."
"There's more to life than that."
"That's all you ever want to do."
"That's not true."
"You don't care what happens to anybody as long as you can get it on. I'm not like that. If that's what you want from me, then you've got the wrong person."
"I care about what happens in the world. I just don't care if I control it."
"Wouldn't you like to stop the war? You probably don't care about the war. All you're worried about is getting drafted. You just don't want to be shot."
"Maybe not," J.D. said.
"You just don't want to die."
"So what's wrong with that?"
"You only care about yourself."
"And why are you so concerned about the war? Why would you want to stop it? Why would any woman want to stop it? If women don't want to run things and they aren't afraid of getting killed why would you want to stop it?"
"I want to stop it because it's a symbol. It represents all the shit which men hand to women. I want to stop it so
that I will know that when the government and all the men
tried to run my life or anybody's life at least I tried to
stop it. Don't you know they're trying to take over your
life?"

"They haven't tried yet."

"I don't mean the army. I mean all of them. The high
school principals and the college professors. The cops and
the government."

"They haven't bothered me too much lately."

"What about that one professor you're always telling me
about? He hassles you all the time."

"Which professor?"

"That English professor you're always telling me about."
J.D. began to laugh. "You mean Doctor Agnew?"

"Yes, that's the one."

"Doctor Agnew is a woman."

Julia swung the photo album in her hand at J.D.'s head.
J.D. rolled away untouched and continued laughing.

"I'm trying to be serious," Julia said.

"I am serious. Doctor Agnew is a woman."

"That's beside the point. Men tell her what to do. She's
been brainwashed."

"I'll tell her that when I see her."

"Let's forget all that. I'll show you some more pictures."

"OK, let's look at the pictures."

Julia opened the album with the portraits of herself.
"This was taken when I was nineteen," she said.

J.D. leaned over and looked at the picture closely. The picture did not show the small pock marks which were now on Julia's cheeks.

"It was taken before you were messed up."

"Messed up? What are you talking about?"

"These little marks."

"They used an airbrush. I still had them. I've had them since I was fifteen."

J.D. reached over and turned the page.

"When was this one taken?"

"Last year. My parents have one taken of me every year. Sometimes I wish they wouldn't."

"I guess you have to put up with that kind of stuff sometimes."

"Why? Why should I do stuff like that?"

"Because of the money they give you."

"I don't just do it for the money."

"And because parents like you to do that kind of stuff. You do it because they like it. Because they're your parents."

"But I don't do it for the money," Julia said.

"OK, so you don't do it for the money."

"Not for the money."

J.D. picked up one of the other albums. It was filled with old pictures of a little girl.

"That was me when I was little. It was before you were born," Julia said.
"I'm sorry I couldn't be there."

"We lived in Lubbock then. We lived in a great big house. We used to make homemade ice cream on Sundays. We had a lot of good times."

"I've never had homemade ice cream."

"We never have it anymore."

"I've never had it."

Julia slowly closed up the albums and put them into the closet.

"What time are we leaving tomorrow?" she asked.

"Whatever time you want to leave. It will take about four and a half hours to get there."

"Anytime is fine with me. Whenever you want."

"How about noon?"

"You don't want to go earlier?"

"No. Noon would be fine with me. You'll like it there. It's nice down there."

"I'm anxious to get to Austin."

"We'll go up on Saturday."

"I thought we were going on Friday."

"We can go on Friday if you want."

"We can find out where we're staying. Bucky was going to arrange a place for us to stay."

"I thought we were going to stay over at John's brother's house."

"That creep. I don't want to be around him or his brother or any of the rest of them."
"The rest of who?"
"You know, Tino, New York. The rest of those guys."
"What's wrong with them?"
"I don't know. I just don't want to be around them."
"They're all right."
"OK, whatever you say. I just don't want to be around them."

"We can stay wherever you want."

"Listen, don't let me tell you what to do. You do whatever you want. Stay wherever you want. You stay with John and Tino if you want to. I'm going to stay at the place Bucky finds for me."

"If you don't want to stay at John's brother's, it's all right with me. We can stay wherever you want. I just don't know what's wrong with John or Tino or any of the rest of them."

"They're all conceited; that's what's wrong with them. They all think they're all such big deals. They think they're all going to be famous someday. I've got news for them. They're never going to amount to anything. They're always going to be exactly what they are--nothing."

"How do you know all that."
"I know. You just wait and see."
"I don't think they're like that."
"They are. I don't want to be around them. I don't want to be around when they find out they aren't going anywhere."
"They aren't really like that. They're not conceited."
"You're the same way. You think you're pretty hot stuff. You think you're always right. You have your faults too.
Don't think I haven't noticed."

"What do I have to do with this? I'm not conceited. I don't think I'm going to be somebody big and famous someday. I don't even know what I want to be."

"Never mind any of that. Never mind what I said. I just don't want to be around John. He makes fun of me all the time."

"No he doesn't. He hardly ever mentions you," J.D. said.

"What does he say about me?"

"Nothing. He hardly ever says anything."

"He makes fun of me when I'm around. He must do the same thing when I'm not there. What do you tell those guys about me?"

"Nothing. I don't tell them anything."

"I bet you tell them all about what we do in bed together."

"I don't tell them anything."

"I bet you brag about the piece of ass you get whenever you want."

"I don't do that. I don't tell them anything."

"Maybe not."

"I don't tell them anything at all."

"Maybe," she said.

"We'll stay wherever you want in Austin. We don't even have to see those guys if you don't want to."
"Don't let me tell you what to do. You can see them all you want. Just don't do it when I'm around."

"OK. But we'll stay wherever you want."

"Fine. And we'll go up on Friday."

"Whatever you want," J.D. said.

"Fine. As long as that's what you want to do. Don't let me tell you what to do."

"No, it's OK with me."

"Fine. Let's have some lunch."

"Whatever you want to do."
J.D. and Julia left at three the next afternoon. Julia came and woke J.D. up late. She had all of their things packed into the car already. J.D. got up sleepily and rode quietly. Julia drove at first, but she soon tired. J.D. took over the wheel while Julia stretched out in the back seat and fell asleep.

The interstate was crowded, so J.D. decided to leave the main route and follow an older road. He was in no hurry, and he enjoyed the scenery and the small towns along the way. In the afternoon he came upon a small creek as it crossed the road. A stand of trees was nestled to one side. J.D. pulled over and parked under the trees. He turned and looked at Julia in the back seat. She did not wake up.

He got out of the car and walked over to the edge of the creek. It reminded him of the creek he often sat beside in Denton. It was very quiet. The traffic along the road was light. J.D. was alone.

J.D. watched the water as it flowed by. "This is a nice place," he thought to himself. "More than that. It's a good place. I've been too selfish. I go to places like this and enjoy myself while people are dying for what they believe in and others are dying for something they don't understand. I
don't deserve to be free from it. Julia is right. I'm just a coward. I'm just afraid to die. I don't care anything about the war. I just don't want to die."

J.D. picked up a flat rock and skipped it over the water. "People are dying right now, and I'm not doing anything about it."

J.D. walked quickly back to the car. He started the engine and shot out onto the highway. He drove back to the interstate and headed down the road at a high rate of speed.

By the time they reached San Antonio, it was already dark. J.D. pulled up in front of the house and shut off the engine. Julia had not awakened during the rest of the trip. J.D. got out of the car and looked at the house. It was a very ordinary house, much like the house in which Julia's parents lived, except that it was a two-story house. Vines grew up one side to a second story window. When J.D. was a boy, he would climb out the window and down the vines to stalk the night, and then climb back up the vine near morning.

He reached in through the back window of the car and gently woke Julia.

"We're here," J.D. said.

"What time is it?"

"It's nearly eight-thirty."

"I guess we better get this over with."

"You'll like my parents. They're all right."
"Should we take our stuff right in?"

"No, I think we should go in and have you meet them first, then we can get this stuff later."

"Fair enough," she said.

Julia got out of the car and stretched. She rubbed her shoulder and looked at J.D.

"What are you looking at?" she said.

"That window up there. That's my room."

J.D. led the way up the walk and through the front door without knocking. They passed by a small room to the left and went to the back of the house.

"Is anybody home?" J.D. called.

A short man rose from a chair and shook hands with J.D. A boy a few years younger than J.D. entered from the kitchen.

"How are you doing, son," the man said. The boy came over and slapped J.D. on the back.

"Jasper, you're home."

J.D. smiled and lightly punched the boy on the arm. He turned to Julia. She was blankly looking at the TV.

"Jimmy, Dad, this is Julia, the girl I was telling you about."

"How are you?" J.D.'s father said.

"Fine. I'm a little tired from the trip," she said without looking away from the TV.

"Don't listen to her," J.D. said. "She slept the whole way."
"We thought you'd be here a little earlier," Jimmy said.
"We got away a little later than I thought we would. But we made it just the same."
"We got your old room all ready," Jimmy said. "I've got an extra bed in my room. You're going to bunk in with me."
"Just like the old days," J.D. said.
"Like when we were kids," Jimmy said.
"Jimmy and me shared a room when we were small," J.D. said, turning back to Julia. She continued to stand looking blankly at the TV.
"Your mother went to the store," J.D.'s father said.
"She'll be back soon."
"What's for supper?" J.D. asked.
"I guess we'll find out when she gets home," said Jimmy.
J.D. laughed and grabbed Jimmy around the neck. They wrestled around then fell to the floor.
"Come on, you guys," said their father. "You're not kids anymore."
"We may not be kids, but we're still close to the ground," J.D. said.
"Get off me before I break your kneecap again."
J.D. finally rolled off. The two brothers lay on the floor laughing.
"I can still beat you," J.D. said. "The only time you ever won was that one time you broke my knee."
"I may just do it again if you don't stay in line."
"Do you want to sit down?" J.D.'s father said to Julia. She sat down slowly in a nearby chair without speaking.

"How long are you going to be here?" Jimmy said.

"We're going up to Austin on Friday. We'll be here until then."

"Why are you going up there?" Jimmy asked.

"There's an anti-war rally up there on Sunday. We thought we'd go and watch or march or something."

"I didn't know you cared anything about the war," Jimmy said.

"I do. I do now."

"Getting to be that age."

"What age?"

"The rebellious age," said Jimmy.

"I've always been rebellious."

"You always have."

"Even when you were little," said J.D.'s father. "He never wanted to go to sleep when he was supposed to."

"Maybe I wanted to watch the Late Show. I watch it all the time now."

"Come on upstairs," Jimmy said. "I want to show you something."

J.D. started to follow Jimmy from the room. He stopped suddenly when he realized that Julia was not following.

"Come on Julia," he said. "Come on with us."

Julia stared blankly at the TV.
"Julia."

Julia turned her head slowly and looked at J.D.

"Come on. We're going upstairs."

Julia got up from her chair and followed J.D. slowly.

Jimmy led the way up the stairs. When they reached his room at the top of the stairs, he waited a moment until both J.D. and Julia were inside, then he shut the door and locked it.

"There's something I want you to see," he said.

Jimmy went over to the closet and took down a shoe box. He opened it carefully and took out a small leather pouch. He opened the leather pouch and produced a plastic bag.

"You know what this is?" he asked.

J.D. took the small plastic bag and opened it. Inside were three mushrooms, each about an inch in diameter.

"Mushrooms," J.D. said.


"Psylocibin?" J.D. said. "What's that?"

"It's psychodelic, man. It makes you see all kinds of good things."

"Like what?" J.D. said.

"Last night I took one of these and I saw a huge bird swoop down through the roof of the room here and grab a giant snake in its claws and fly away. At first I thought it was going to grab me, but it took the snake instead. And the colors. I don't think anybody's seen those colors before."
"You took this stuff right here in the house?"
"Sure. They never know what I'm doing up here. I have a lock on the door, anyway."
"What if you freak out on something and start banging on things? Aren't you worried about what they'd do?"
"No. Why should I be? I have a right to a life of my own."
"But right here in the house?"
"They'd really freak out if they knew. But who cares?"
"Yeah, I guess you're right. Who cares?"
"You have any dope, man?" Julia said.
J.D. and Jimmy turned and looked at her.
"Sure, I have some. A little bit, anyway," Jimmy said.
"How about something to smoke it with?" she said.
"I have a pipe and some papers."
"Why don't we smoke some?" she said.
"I don't mind taking the mushrooms here, but I can't cover up the smoke."
"I thought you said your parents were cool," she said to J.D.
"They're cool," Jimmy said. "I just don't try to push them too hard."
"Why don't we go for a ride and smoke some in the car?" J.D. said.
"Sure. The car would be OK," Jimmy said.
"We could ride around and look at the old neighborhood," J.D. said.
"We've been in the car all day," Julia said.

"Maybe we could find someplace to go so we won't have to stay in the car," Jimmy said.

"We could go to Moby's house," J.D. said.

"Moby?" Julia said.

"Andrew Mowbray," Jimmy said.

"He's a friend of mine from grade school, practically," J.D. said.

"Is he cool?"

"I've known him for years."

"Will he mind us smoking at his place?"

"He's my best friend, for God's sake."

"I heard he was having a party tonight," Jimmy said.

"There'll be a lot of people I know there," said J.D.

"How do you know that?"

"I used to go to his parties all the time. There'll probably be a lot of my old friends there."

"Brian will probably be there. And the Greek," said Jimmy.

"All right," said J.D. "We have to go now. I haven't seen them since December."

"If you want to go, go ahead and go," Julia said.

"You don't want to go?"

"I'm kind of tired. I just want to smoke some and go to bed."

"If you want to smoke, we'll have to go for a ride. We might as well go to Moby's party as anywhere else," J.D. said.
"OK, if we have to go, we might as well go," Julia said.

"Let's see the dope," J.D. said.

Jimmy reached into the same box he took the mushrooms out of and produced a plastic bag rolled up like a fat cigar.

"Here," Jimmy said. "You can take the whole lid."

"You don't want to come?" J.D. said.

"No," Jimmy said. "I've been grounded."

"Oh yeah? What for?"

"No big deal," Jimmy said. "I just got home a little late last week. Say, four hours late. I didn't mind. I just hit a couple of these mushrooms and sit around my room all day. I see as much here as I do anywhere else, so what the hell?"

"I see what you mean." J.D. said. "You're sure you don't mind us taking the lid?"

"No, go right ahead. Just bring some of it back."

J.D. put the lid in his pocket.

"Come on," J.D. said. "We'll bring our stuff in, and then go over to Moby's house."

"I want to lie down a while before we go," Julia said. "Why don't you bring the stuff in while I lie down. We can go after a while."

"We still have to eat dinner first," Jimmy said.

"I forgot about that," J.D. said. "I guess I was kind of anxious to see Moby again."

"That party will last all night," Jimmy said. "Don't worry about getting there late."
"Come on," J.D. said to Julia. "I'll show you my room. You'll be staying there."

J.D. led the way out of Jimmy's room down the hall to the room he had grown up in. He reached in and turned on the light, then stepped aside for Julia.

"This is it," J.D. said. "This is where I used to stay."

"It's kind of small," Julia said.

"But it's got lots of windows," J.D. said. There were two windows which stretched across the length of the wall. One large window dominated an adjacent wall. A twin bed was pushed into the corner beneath the windows.

"It's still a small room," she said. "I feel closed in when I try to sleep in a small room."

"I feel the same way if the room doesn't have a window."

"I'm going to lie down."

"I'll bring the stuff in. I'll get Jimmy to help me."

"OK." Julia lay down on the bed and closed her eyes. J.D. sat down beside her on the bed.

"I thought you were going to get the stuff."

"I just thought I'd sit here a while."

"I'm tired. I don't know why. I slept the whole way down."

"You just need to get up and move around a little. We've been sitting around this whole vacation and not doing anything."

"Maybe a party would perk me up. Maybe it's a good idea."

"Sure it's a good idea," J.D. said. "Besides, all my old friends will be there."
"Go get the stuff," Julia said. "I'll feel better after a while."

J.D. left the room and shut the door softly. He looked in Jimmy's room but it was empty. He went down the stairs looking for him. His father was sitting in the family room reading the paper.

"So how's school going?" he said.

"I don't know, Dad," J.D. said. "Sometimes I think I'm not cut out for college."

"You'll get over it after a while. It takes you a couple of years to get used to it. As soon as you decide what to major in you'll feel a lot better."

"I decided to major in English."

"English? What can you do with that? What kind of job?"

"I don't know," J.D. said. "I never gave it much thought. I'll worry about that later."

"You ought to worry about it right now. You ought to be a business major. That's where the real money is. I was reading in the paper the other day that business majors are starting at 10,000 dollars. I was forty years old before I started making that much."

"There's more to the world than money," J.D. said.

"All the kids say that nowadays," his father shot back. "They never complained while they were growing up in some rich suburb in their parents' 50,000 dollar home, driving the cars their parents bought for them. Money doesn't
mean anything to kids. You never had to worry about it. You just had it handed to you on a silver platter."

"Maybe so," J.D. said. "Maybe you'd be happier if I dropped out of school and went to work for a living."

"It wouldn't bother me at all. If you could find a job."

"I could find a job."

"What could you do? The competition is pretty fierce out there."

"I could do a lot of things."

"Yeah, you could sweep floors somewhere, or cook hamburgers, but you couldn't get a really good job."

"You never went to college. How did you get a job?"

"You think I started out at the top? I started out sweeping the floors. I watched what they did around the shop and when somebody quit, I moved up. It took me a lot of years of hard work before I got to the front office."

"I could do that."

"Sure you could do that, but why bother? With a degree you could start a lot higher up the ladder."

"You really believe that?"

"Sure I believe it; it's the truth. If I didn't believe it, I wouldn't be spending 4,000 dollars a year to send you there."

"I mean about moving up the ladder. You really think that's the only way to live."

"I don't think so. Society thinks so."

"There are other ways."
"Sure, if you want to live on some commune somewhere. It's not as great as it sounds. Most of those kids who move to those places move out a couple of months later. They can't take it."

"Never mind. I don't care about communes or success right now. I'm just not sure what I want."

"You'll come to your senses someday," J.D.'s father said. "You'll see that I was right all the time."

A car door slammed outside. The front door opened and a small woman with mousy brown hair walked in carrying a bag of groceries.

"Hello everybody," she called. "Hello John. I knew that must be your little girl friend's car out front and that you were home from school. How are you, Son?"

"I'm fine, Ma," J.D. said. "Julia is upstairs lying down. She's kind of tired."

"Tired?" J.D.'s father said. "She looked ready to pass out."

"That's not a nice thing to say," J.D.'s mother said. "Well, that's the way she looked. She walks around like a zombie."

"Quiet Dad," J.D. said. "She might hear you."

"How can she hear me from way upstairs? She didn't even hear me when she was standing right here in the same room."

"Come on, Dad. She was just kind of tired, that's all."

"Kind of tired is right. Like a zombie."
"Quit it, Dad."

"All right, all right. But I would have found a more wide awake girl."

"Now, stop bickering, you two," J.D.'s mother said. "It's not like you at all."

"OK, OK."

"What's for dinner, Ma?" J.D. said.

"I'm going to fix your favorite dish, John. Sweet and sour pork."

"I should have come home earlier."

"We thought you would come home at the beginning of the week."

"Julia wanted me to stay at her house for a few days."

"It's all right," J.D.'s mother said. "We're glad to have you home."

"Where's Jimmy?" J.D. said.

"I'm in the kitchen," Jimmy called from the next room.

"Come on and help me bring the stuff in from the car," J.D. called back. "There's more than you'd think."

Jimmy came out of the kitchen and followed J.D. out to the car. J.D. loaded up Jimmy's arms with clothes.

"That Julia's a pretty weird chick," Jimmy said.

"She's not weird. She's normal compared to some of the girls I've seen you with."

"I've taken out some pretty weird chicks before. But I've never brought one of them home with me."
"This girl is special."
"How is she so special?"
"That's private."
"I don't understand."
"You're not supposed to."

J.D. and Jimmy carried in all of the suitcases packed into the car. J.D. put most of the things in Jimmy's room. He took Julia's suitcase in hand and slowly and quietly opened the door to his own room. Julia lay on the bed asleep. He closed the door and crept over to the bed. He watched her sleeping for a long time.
"Where did you meet this girl?" J.D.'s mother said over the dinner table.

"Yeah, Jasper, where did you meet her?" Jimmy said.

"I met her at the dorm," J.D. said. "She was over there visiting this friend of mine."

"I'll bet she was," Jimmy said.

"She doesn't seem to be exactly the type of girl you usually go out with," his mother said.

"That's why I like her," J.D. said. "She's not your average girl."

"I'll bet," Jimmy said.

"Shut up Jimmy," J.D. said.

"Now don't talk to your brother like that," J.D.'s mother said.

"I was just kidding around," J.D. said.

"I was just kidding too," Jimmy said.

"I never understand what you're talking about," J.D.'s mother said.

"Just be happy you don't," J.D.'s father said.

"It's not as bad as that," Jimmy said.

"I'll bet," J.D. said.

"Watch your kneecaps," Jimmy said.

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"It was your line," J.D. said.

"It's no fair using it against me."

"I'm serious," J.D.'s mother said. "Did you really meet that girl at your dorm?"

"Sure. She was with a friend of mine."

"She's a freshman, then. Just like you."

"No Ma," J.D. said. "She's a graduate student."

"How old is she? She can't be that close to your age."

"She's twenty-four, Ma."

"Twenty-four? My, what do you talk about?"

"They don't talk," Jimmy said.

"We have more in common than you think," J.D. said.

"How can you tell," J.D.'s father said. "She doesn't talk."

"She talks," J.D. said. "We have a lot to talk about."

"I'll bet," Jimmy said.

"She talks, all right?" J.D. said. "Jimmy heard her talk upstairs."

"That's right," Jimmy said. "She said she was tired."

"She looked it," J.D.'s father said.

"Will you guys cut it out?" J.D. said. "You're making fun of her and you don't even know her."

"It's just that we're very concerned about you," J.D.'s mother said. "We don't want you to get into a situation you can't get out of."

"Don't worry about it," J.D. said.
"We're not worried," J.D.'s father said. "We're concerned. We feel we have a right to know what's going on, to know what you're doing with your life."

"Well, it's my life. I'll figure out what to do with it. Don't worry about it; I'll turn out all right."

"We're sure you will," J.D.'s mother said. "We just want to make sure you know that you're doing the right thing."

"I know what I'm doing," J.D. said.

"How do you know?" J.D.'s father asked.

"I've been around. I know what I'm doing."

"You've been around? You've lived seventeen years and you have one semester of college. I guess you have enough experience to run the world by now."

"I don't want to run the world," J.D. said.

"So you don't want to run the world. So you don't want to run anything. We're just concerned, that's all."

"I'll get by. I'll be all right."

"Fine, fine," J.D.'s father said. "You'll be fine. Everything will be fine."

"I'll bet," Jimmy said.

"Shut up, Jimmy," J.D. said.

"That's enough out of both of you," J.D.'s father said.

J.D. picked at his food. From time to time he looked at Jimmy out of the corner of his eye. Jimmy smiled to himself and ate his food hardly. The family finished the meal in silence.
"Julia," J.D. said, shaking her gently. Julia opened one eye and looked at him sleepily. She rolled from her side onto her back and reached up and stroked the back of J.D.'s neck.

"What time is it?" Julia said.

"It's about ten o'clock."

"Do you want me to get up?"

"I want to go over to Moby's house."

"Will the party over at this Moby's house be any good?"

"I've been to some pretty good parties at his house before."

"We might as well go, then."

"That's the spirit," J.D. said.

Julia rose from the bed and planted a kiss on J.D.'s forehead. J.D. tried to put his arms around her but she quickly stood up straight and pulled away from him.

"If we're going to go, we might as well go," she said.

J.D. followed her down the stairs. She turned at the foot of the stairs and went out the door. J.D. walked back to the family room.

"We're going to Moby's house," J.D. called.

"Have a nice time," J.D.'s mother called back.

"If you come home late, don't wake up the whole house," J.D.'s father said over his newspaper.

"We won't be home that late," J.D. said. "I'll see you later."

J.D. ran out to the car. Julia sat in the front seat on the passenger side.
J.D. got in and started the car.

"Don't worry," J.D. said. "You'll like Moby. He's pretty cool."

Julia said nothing. J.D. drove slowly and confidently. He had learned to drive the year before on the same streets. He knew every bend and pothole.

They arrived at Moby's house without speaking. There were many cars parked in front of the house.

"I recognize some of these cars," J.D. said. "This is going to be quite a party."

"I hope so."

J.D. knocked on the door. He could hear loud music from inside. Nobody came to the door right away. J.D. knocked louder. Finally the door opened and a thin red-haired boy about J.D.'s age stood before them. He held out his hand.

"My man J.D.," the red-haired boy said.

"Moby," J.D. said. "How are you?"

"I didn't even know you were in town, man," Moby said. "When did you get here?"

"About two hours ago."

"How long are you going to be here?"

"We're going up to Austin on Friday. There's supposed to be a big anti-war rally up there on Saturday."

"Anti-war rally. Boy, I wish I could go to one of those. I have to stay home this weekend and paint the house."
"I want you to meet someone," J.D. said turning to Julia. "This is Julia. She's from up at North Texas. We're going to that rally on Saturday together."

"How you doing, Julia," Moby said. "If you're a friend of J.D.'s, you must be cool. Welcome to my humble abode and my most decadent party."

Julia looked past Moby into the house. She nodded her head and said nothing.

"Come on in," Moby said. "Don't stand out there. Come on, J.D. I want to show you what my brother did to his room."

Moby led J.D. to a room in the back of the house. When he opened the door it first appeared dark inside, but J.D. soon realized that it was lit by a black light.

"Close that door," a voice called from inside.

"Is that J.D. I see?"

"It is J.D.," the first voice said.

"Come on in," a girl's voice called. "The water's fine."

J.D. could hear water sloshing about.

"What did your brother do," J.D. said to Moby. "Build a swimming pool in his bedroom?"

"No, man," Moby said. "He got a water bed."

"Come on, J.D.," the girl's voice called. "It feels great. It's a real rush."

J.D. took a tentative step into the room and waited for his eyes to adjust to the dark.

"It's straight in front of you," Moby said.
"Where's Julia?" J.D. said.
"She's back out there in the living room," Moby said.
"Come on in, J.D.," the girl's voice called. "The water's fine."
"I've got to go find Julia," J.D. said to the darkened room.
"Who needs her?" the girl's voice said.
"Maybe I do," a male voice said from the darkness.
"I'll be right back," J.D. said.
J.D. walked back to the front of the house. Julia was sitting on a couch staring at the ceiling.
"What are you doing out here," J.D. said. "Come on in the back."
"OK," she said. "Whatever you want."
J.D. took Julia by the hand. She let him lead her back to the darkened room. They stepped into the room and stood still.
"I've changed my mind," the male voice said.
"Come on J.D.," the girl said.
J.D. took a step forward in the darkness. His foot bumped against something solid.
"You don't have to kick me," the male voice said.
"I didn't see you," J.D said. "Who is that anyway?"
"It's Johnston," the voice said.
"Come on in, J.D.," the girl said. "The water's fine."
"I know that," J.D. said. "Where the hell is the water?"
"Right here," the girl said. J.D. felt a hand against his leg. It rubbed up and down his thigh slowly and pulled him to the left into the dark.

"I can't believe you don't see anything," Johnston said from below. "Your shirt's lit up like a spotlight."

As J.D.'s eyes adjusted, he could see that his shirt glowed slightly in the black light.

"It's the material," the girl said.

"Who's that on the bed?" J.D. said, reaching down to take hold of the hand on his thigh.

"Betty Dobson," Johnston said. "Sherry Dobson's little sister."

"I don't think we've met," J.D. said. "I don't know you."

"But I know you," Betty said. "Better and better all the time."

J.D. reached out and tried to get a better grip on her arm.

"I didn't even know Sherry had a little sister."

"I knew about you," Betty said.

"Where from?" J.D. said. "Did your sister tell you about me?"

"I used to see you around school."

"Where are you?" Julia said from behind him.

"I'm right here. Follow my voice."

J.D. felt Julia bump against his side. Betty's hand withdrew from his leg.
"Sit down," Betty said. "This water bed is a real rush."

J.D. sat down slowly. The mattress of the bed gave way underneath him, then suddenly pushed him back up. The mattress then settled into a gentle waving motion, rising and falling in regular intervals.

"Sit right down here," J.D. said in Julia's direction.

"Isn't that a rush?" Betty said beside his ear.

Then Julia sat down beside him. As her body pressed down into the bed, the water pushed up against J.D. Then the water rushed from beneath J.D. and pushed Julia's body up. The water continued to flow back and forth between them, creating a gentle to-and-fro rocking.

"Come on, Betty," Johnston said. "I want to show you some new headphones I got for my car stereo."

Betty got up from the bed, starting the water in a furious wave of motion.

"I'll see you later, J.D.," she said.

"Later, J.D.," Johnston said.

"How do you like the bed?" Moby said.

"This is kind of strange," J.D. said.

"So what are you up to lately?" Moby said. "How is school going?"

"School is really awful," J.D. said.

"That bad?" Moby said.

"I'm going to quit at the end of this semester and find a job."
"Have you told your dad that you're going to quit?"
"No, not yet. He'll find out soon enough. Maybe I'll tell him while I'm here."
"What are you going to do?" Moby said. "I mean, what kind of job are you going to get?"
"I don't know yet. I'm sure I'll be able to find something."
"I didn't know college was that tough."
"College is designed to destroy your mind," Julia said.
"Destroy your mind?" Moby said in amazement.
"It's just like torture," Julia said. "They're trying to brainwash all the students, to make them docile."
"Why didn't you tell me that Johnston was in here?" J.D. said after a long silence.
"I didn't remember."
"Why should he have told you that?" Julia asked.
"Johnston and J.D. hate each other," Moby said. "They even got into a fight last year."
"We get along better than we used to," J.D. said.
"That's because you moved out of town," Moby said.
"Maybe so," J.D. said.
"Can you turn on a regular light," Julia said.
"What for?" Moby said.
"I want to roll a joint."
"Sure, I can turn on a light for that."
Moby turned on the light. But just as Julia finished rolling a joint, the door opened.
"Hey Moby, there's some guy out here who wants to talk to you."

"I'll be back after a while," Moby said, getting up. "Enjoy yourselves." He turned out the light as he left.

Julia lit the joint and inhaled deeply. "Now that's more like it," she said. She handed it to J.D. He drew the sweet smoke deep into his lungs. They lay back on the bed and looked at the ceiling.

"Why does your brother call you Jasper?" Julia said.

"That's his own private nickname for me. He made it up when we were kids."

"Why does everybody else call you J.D., then? Why couldn't they call you Jasper?"

"If everybody started using Jasper, he'd think up a different one."

"Why does everybody else call you J.D., then?"

"I started using just those initials when I started school. The teachers couldn't figure out if my name was John Alfred or Alfred John. I still have that problem sometimes."

"You have two first names."

"I don't mind as long as you just call me J.D. You can't mix that up."

"I guess not. You went from having two first names to having no name at all."

The door opened and Moby stepped through the blinding light.
"Say J.D.," Moby said, "I want to talk to you for a minute outside."

J.D. rose slowly off the rolling bed. He went outside the room with Moby.

"Listen, my brother's home," Moby said, once outside. "So?" J.D. said. "So he wants to use his room. He's got a chick with him."

"Oh, I see," J.D. said. "We'll move out right away."

"You can use one of the other bedrooms," Moby said.

"No, that's OK. We weren't doing anything."

"Sorry about making you move, but it is his room."

"No problem," J.D. said, going back into the room.

"What's the matter?" Julia said.

"We have to move out," J.D. said. "Moby's brother is home and wants to go to bed."

"How can Moby throw these parties, anyway?"

"His parents are out of town. They have a cabin on a lake somewhere. They're hardly ever here."

"Let's just go home," Julia said.

"OK, I guess we could go if you want to."

"You can do whatever you want. Don't let me tell you what to do."

"It's OK. I don't mind."

"We weren't here very long."

"That's all right."

"You didn't get to talk to your friends."
"It doesn't matter. I'll talk to them tomorrow or the day after."

"I'm going up to Austin tomorrow," Julia said.

"Tomorrow? I thought we were going to wait until Friday."

"I'm sort of anxious to get up there."

"We didn't stay here very long. One day."

"You don't have to come along. I'm not forcing you to go with me. You can stay if you want. Do whatever you want."

"I guess I'll come along."

"I'm not trying to force you."

"That's OK. I don't mind."

"You can do whatever you want."

"That is what I want to do," J.D. said.

"Well, OK, if you want to go."

"Yes, I want to go."

"What time do you want to leave?"

"I don't care. Whatever time you want."

"Fine. I'm kind of anxious to get there."

"Where are we going to stay?" J.D. asked.

"I have some friends up there. I went to school there. I can find a place. This weekend we can stay at the place Bucky promised us."

"Are you sure Bucky can find a place?"

"If he doesn't, we'll stay with some friends of mine."

"We could stay over at John's brother's."

"I don't want to go near that place. I told you that before."
"Well, if you can find someplace else, I guess it will be all right."

"You can stay there if you want. Don't let me tell you what to do."

"No, we'll stay wherever you want."

They had reached the front door of the house. Moby stood outside in the warm evening air.

"Are you leaving already?" Moby asked.

"Yeah," J.D. said. "Julia wants to get home."

"Sorry about the room," Moby said.

"Don't worry about it," J.D. said.

"I guess I'll see you tomorrow," Moby said. "I'll come by your house."

"We decided to go to Austin tomorrow," J.D. said. "We'll be up there all weekend, then we're going back to Denton."

"That's too bad," Moby said. "Maybe I'll come up to Austin this weekend instead of painting. Maybe I'll see you there."

"Yeah, maybe," J.D. said. Julia walked away from them toward the car.

"Listen, I'll see you later," J.D. said.

"That's a pretty weird chick you got there," Moby said softly.

"Yeah, maybe so," J.D. said. "I'll see you later."

"Maybe this weekend."

"Yeah, this weekend."
J.D. ran to catch up with Julia. She had reached the car and gotten in. J.D. got in the driver's side and started the engine. J.D. drove home in silence. When they reached the house, J.D. turned to Julia. She pushed him away and got out of the car and started up the walk. J.D. sighed and followed slowly. Once inside, Julia went straight up the stairs. J.D. watched her until she went around a bend in the stairs, then he went into the family room. His father sat watching the television. He sat down and began to watch also.

"Where's your friend?" his father said.
"She went to bed, I guess," J.D. said.
"How is Moby?" he said.
"About the same."
"You didn't stay over there very long," his father said.
"No," J.D. said. "Julia was tired."
They sat and watched the TV.
"Oh, by the way," J.D. said. "We're leaving tomorrow and going to Austin."
"Tomorrow? I thought you were staying until Friday."
"We changed our minds. We're going to visit a couple of Julia's friends up in Austin."
"You mean you changed your minds just like that?"
"We'd been thinking about doing it for a while."
"Then why didn't you mention it? Your mother was planning on having you here for a couple of days."
"Well, we decided to go to Austin."
"Maybe she decided for you," J.D.'s father said, pointing at the ceiling.

"I can make up my own mind."

"Then why don't you let her go up there by herself? She can visit her friends and you can stay home and visit your family and your friends."

"I'd rather go with Julia," J.D. said. "She likes to have me around."

"Does she whistle, or what?"

"Cut it out, Dad," J.D. said.

"That's not the right kind of girl for you, John."

"I'll decide that for myself."

"You need to find a nice young freshman."

"I'll decide what kind of girl friend I want."

"I don't think you picked this one," his father said. "I think she picked you. And I don't think she's going to keep you around very long. That's what kind of girl I think she is."

"How do you know what kind of girl she is? You don't know anything."

"I've been around, my friend. I know what I'm talking about. When you get to be as old as I am, you'll know what I'm talking about."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"You just wait and see."

"That's not all I wanted to tell you," J.D. said. "I'm going to drop out of school at the end of this semester."
His father looked at him in surprise. "I suppose that was her idea, too," he said.

"I thought of that one all by myself," J.D. said. "I just don't like college very much. I'd rather be doing something else."

"And what else would you like to be doing? Have you thought about that?"

"I'll get a job," J.D. said.

"Doing what? What are you going to do?"

"I'll find something. I can take care of myself."

"You won't find anything that you can live on," his father said. "About the only thing you'll be able to do is join the Army. That's the only place you could find a good job right off. Would your little friend stay around if you did that?"

"I wouldn't do a thing like that. I don't want to be in the Army. They're just a bunch of killers."

"Then be a janitor. That's the only kind of job you're going to get."

"I'll find something. I'll survive."

"How do you know? You've never had to survive on your own before."

"What do you know about me? You've never listened to me in your life. All you do is order me to do something and then ask me if I've done it," J.D. shouted. "You're always ordering me around. Ever since I could remember, you've been running my life. You ordered me to go to school; you ordered me to
go to college; you give me money and then order me to spend it the way you wanted it spent. Well this is my life. I'll do what I want with it. I'll make my own money and I'll spend it the way I want. I may not make as much as you, but at least it will be mine."

J.D.'s father stared at him until he stopped.

"Fine. If that's what you want to do, go ahead. I can't stop you. Have your own way, baby. More power to you."

J.D. stomped out of the room toward the stairs.

"And when you run out of money, don't come running to me," J.D.'s father shot after him.

"Don't worry," J.D. shouted back. "This is the last place I'd come."

J.D. stalked up the stairs and into his old room, slamming the door. Julia sat up in the bed.

"What was all the shouting?" she asked.

"We're leaving first thing in the morning and we're not coming back here," J.D. said.

"Sure," Julia said. "Whatever you say."

J.D. grabbed Julia by the shoulders. "We need each other now. Whatever happens, it's just you and me."

"Calm down, calm down," Julia said. "Sit down here and I'll rub your back." J.D. sat down on the edge of the bed. "Your neck muscles are really tight," she said.

"He has no right to treat me like that. I'm not his slave."
"Hey, baby," she said softly, kissing his ear. "It's OK. Just relax."

"No right. No right at all."

"It's OK, baby. Everything's all right."

J.D. turned to face her. He stared deep into her eyes. The brightness he remembered from the first time he saw her shone brilliantly.

"I want to make love," J.D. said. "I want to make love now."

Julia smiled and lay back on the bed. She pulled him over on top of her.

Two hours later J.D. crept over to his brother's room and fell into the extra bed completely spent. He fell asleep immediately. The energy which had been building for weeks of abstinence combined with the anger which split open from deep within him against his father was gone. He did not dream. He was as a man who had been without sleep for many days.

Sometime in the early morning he heard Jimmy get up to go to school. He heard his father outside the door. He heard his voice but he couldn't make out what he was saying. He went back to sleep. Later in the morning he was awakened suddenly. It was Julia climbing into bed with him. She smiled at him and closed her eyes. J.D. fell back asleep, smiling to himself. When he finally awoke, Julia was gone.
J.D. got out of bed and stretched. He got dressed slowly and went to his own room. Julia sat in the bed, reading a book. She put the book aside and looked at J.D.

"Pack up the things. I guess we better go before my father comes home."

Julia was already dressed. She got up off the bed and started to gather her things.

"Are you sure these friends of yours are going to have a place for us?" J.D. asked.

"No," Julia replied.

"Then we'll stay over at John's brother's house."

"OK," she said. "We'll stay wherever you want."

"Well, that's where I want to stay."

J.D. didn't wait for a reply, but left the room and went downstairs.

J.D. looked at the clock. It was already two. J.D. felt rested. He was anxious to get going. J.D. looked in the refrigerator for something to eat. His mother sat at the kitchen table.

"Your father says you're going to Austin today," she said.

"That's right."

"I thought you would stay a few days."

"I changed my mind."

"I was going to have a big dinner tonight. Your grandmother and grandfather were going to come over."
"We'll just have to make it some other time."

"Can't you stay even one more day?" she begged.

"No," J.D. said. "We're leaving as soon as the car is packed."

"Not even one day?"

"No, I said. I told you we were leaving and we are."

She stared at the table. J.D. looked at her for a moment, then left the room and went back upstairs. Julia had nearly everything packed. He began carrying things downstairs and putting them in the car. He could see his mother watching from the family room as he went out the door and came back in. He tried not to look.

"That's everything," Julia said at last.

"Let's go then," J.D. said.

Julia followed him down the stairs and out the door. A school bus was stopped out in front of the house. Jimmy got off the bus and it drove on. Jimmy walked up to J.D.

"So you're really leaving," Jimmy said.

"Yes," J.D. said. "I guess I'll see you again someday."

"You're really leaving for good?"

"I can't see myself ever coming back here," J.D. said.

"Wow," Jimmy said. "This is a little hard to take."

They shook hands.

"Take care of yourself," Jimmy said.

"Don't take too many magic mushrooms," J.D. said.
J.D. and Julia got into the car. Jimmy leaned in through the window. "Goodbye, Jasper," he said.

"Goodbye, Jimmy," J.D. said. He started the car and drove away.
CHAPTER XI

J.D. drove to the interstate quickly and sped up the road toward Austin. He felt free and alive on the open highway. He pushed the accelerator to the floor and flew down the road.

"Slow down," Julia said. "We already escaped."

J.D. slowed to the speed limit.

"We should have brought Jimmy with us. He'll have to stay right there and take all the blame," Julia said.

"I didn't think about that," J.D. said. "They probably won't bother him, though. He keeps pretty much to himself."

"After we get through here this weekend, we ought to go pack our stuff and drop out of school right away. We can find someplace where I can find something to do."

"Austin's a good place," Julia said. "There are always places hiring college age people. You won't have any trouble finding something there."

"I don't even know what it's like," J.D. said.

"I have some friends there," Julia said. "They'll give us a hand. You'll like it. You'll see this weekend."

J.D. drove on. He didn't pay close attention to the road. He thought about Austin and getting a job and a place to live.
"We could even look for a place this weekend if you want," Julia said.

"Sure," J.D. said. "We could do that."

"And look for jobs, too."

"Sure," J.D. said.

It took about an hour to reach Austin. When they were near the edge of town, J.D. pulled off and stopped by a phone booth. He still had the phone number John had given him in his pocket. He also had a street address, but Julia did not know the street. He dialed the number to get directions.

"Hello?" a voice answered vaguely.

"Is John there?" J.D. said.

"Just a minute."

"Hello?"

"John? This is J.D."

"My man J.D.!" John said. "Where the hell are you, man?"

"I'm over on the south side of town," J.D. said. "By the interstate."

"So what do you need, man? Directions?"

"Yeah."

"You got sweet Julia with you, man?"

"Sure. What about her?"

"I just wanted to make sure. We weren't expecting you until Friday."

"We're together. Where is this place, man?"
John told J.D. the way to the house. "Tonight, we're going to throw a party to celebrate," John said. "You should see all the stuff we have."

"We'll be there shortly," J.D. said.

"With sweet Julia," John said.

"For the party," J.D. said.

"Later," John said.

"In ten minutes," J.D. said. He hung up the phone. He got back in the car and followed the directions and found the house with no problem.

Julia said nothing.

J.D. threw open the door and walked in. Tino, New York, David, John, and James sat in a circle on the floor. They were all busy rolling joints from a large pile of marijuana in the center of the circle; everyone except James, who sat by and watched.

"Whooeee!" Tino whooped. "You scared us. You should have knocked."

"I wanted to shake you up a little," J.D. said.

"I think you succeeded," David said.

"Hey J.D., I thought you weren't coming until Friday," New York said.

"We decided to come up a little early."

"Just like that?" John said. "And Julia came along with you?"
"She wanted to come. Besides, I wanted to come up here early anyway."

John shook his head. "I never heard of this happening before."

"Of what happening?" J.D. said. "What are you talking about?"

"Nothing," John said, learing at J.D. "We're just glad to see you made it."

"Hey J.D.," New York called. "Sit down and have a smoke."

"I thought we were saving these for the party," David said.

"For the party we got plenty," New York said. "We need to smoke one to see if the stuff's any good."

"Hey, this is good stuff," John said. "My brother guaranteed it as ace number one Panama Red."

"Panama Red?" J.D. said. "You really have Panama Red?"

"Let me tell you, J.D." John said. "This stuff is the best. It will put you in touch with other planets. You'll feel like you never felt before."

"So what are we waiting for?" J.D. said.

The rest made a space in the circle and J.D. sat down. Julia sat down next to him. John looked surprised. J.D.
felt a little surprised himself. Julia reached up and draped her arm over his left shoulder, the one nearest to her.

New York lit a joint and passed it to James. James stared at it with a puzzled look on his face for a moment, then stuck the burning end into his mouth. Tino grabbed his arm and took the joint away from him. He passed it over to John, who passed it to J.D. J.D. had been watching the progress of the joint closely. For some reason he had enjoyed smoking more and more lately. He liked the feeling of increased sensations it seemed to give while at the same time numbing his entire body. He lived through his eyes while stoned, and at times it seemed as if he were completely detached from his body. He imagined himself as being just a pair of eyes hanging in midair, watching with divine omnipotence all that went on around him. His soul was free at such times. The eyes are the windows of the soul, he thought to himself. My soul escapes through the windows of my eyes and roams the earth in freedom.

The joint had come around the circle again and was handed to J.D. The smoke was sweet to his tongue, but his mouth felt dry.

"I have to get something to drink," J.D. said, getting up. "There's some coke in the refrigerator," John said. J.D. wandered in the general direction of the back of the house.

"The kitchen's to the left," John called after him.
Julia jumped up and followed J.D. She caught up to him as he reached the refrigerator and opened it.

"Let me get you a glass," she said.

J.D. let her get a glass out of the cupboard and fill it with coke. He sat down at the kitchen table. She set the glass in front of him. He picked it up and drained it.

"Is your mouth still dry?"

"It's OK now."

"I want to go visit some friends of mine," Julia said. "Some people I went to school with."

"Fine," J.D. said. "Go ahead."

"You don't want to go?"

"No, I think I'll stay here."

"They were thinking of going down to Guadalupe Street later on."

"To where?"

"The Drag. Where Guadalupe Street goes by the university."

"Why would they want to go down there," J.D. asked, trying to focus on the glass in front of him.

"There are always a lot of cool people hanging around down there," she said impatiently. "And record stores and head shops and even the headquarters for the rally. Haven't you ever heard of the Drag?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll tell you what," she said. "I'll go to my friend's house and then meet you down there about eight o'clock."
"Are you sure we can find each other?"

"Don't worry. I've met people down there lots of times."

J.D. stared at the glass.

"I'll see you later," Julia said, leaving the room.

"On the Drag," J.D. said slowly. She was gone. He sat at the table for a while and soon his head began to clear. He looked out the window and noticed that the window was sealed and couldn't be opened. He broke into a cold sweat and got up and left the room quickly. He quickly found Tino by himself in the living room.

"Where did everybody go?" J.D. asked.

"They went with Julia," Tino said.

"With Julia? Was she going to drop them off somewhere?"

"They're going down to the Drag."

"How are they going to get back?"

"The same way they're getting down there."

"But Julia said she was going to visit some friends."

"I guess she changed her mind."

J.D. sat down on the couch. "I thought she said she was going to visit some friends of hers. She told me to meet her down there at eight o'clock. I was supposed to go down when the rest of you went."

"I didn't feel like going," Tino said. "Maybe we can go down later in my car."

"I thought she was going to visit some friends."

"Why did you come up so early?" Tino asked. "Get anxious or something?"
"Julia wanted to come up today. I came along."
"You could have stayed down there longer."
"I got kicked out of the house. My father got really mad at me. Besides, how would I have gotten back? Julia was the only transportation I had."
"You could have called me. I would have come down and gotten you. I've always wanted to visit San Antonio."
"Julia and I are going to find a place after the semester is over and move in together. We're practically living together now. I couldn't just up and let her go wandering off without me. We're a couple. We belong together."
"I can understand that," Tino said. "But she never impressed me as somebody who wanted to settle down."
"She's had a hell of a life," J.D. said. "But she's ready to settle down."
"I don't know."
"Well, I do."
"How has the week been besides the fact that you got kicked out of the house?"
"It's been OK. I saw some of my old friends from high school. It's been a pretty good week for the most part."
"I'm glad to hear you say that," Tino said softly. "The way John and David were talking, Julia was going to have a collar around your neck by the time you got here."
"A collar? Why did they say that?"
"I don't know."
"You think all I do is follow her around like a dog?"

"No."

"Then why the collar?"

"I didn't say it, John and David were saying it."

"What do they know. I'm completely in control of this situation. We know each other pretty well now. We're going to get a place this summer after school's out. Probably right here in Austin."

"I didn't know it was that serious."

"Sure it is. But I know what I'm doing. Don't worry about me."

"There's something you should know about her before you move in with her," Tino said.

"I know her pretty well. I know more about her than you."

"If you know, then it won't be a surprise. If you don't, you really ought to hear it."

"I know all about her. There's nothing you could tell me."

"I think I should tell you anyway."

"So tell me. I'll probably already know anyway."

"Julia is a nymphomaniac."

"So what's wrong with that?" J.D. exploded. "Just because a girl likes sex, just because she may be aggressive, that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with her."

"I don't mean it that way," Tino said.

"So what way did you mean it?"
"I mean it in the technical sense, the psychological sense."

"Which is what?"

"What I mean is she's frigid, probably because of some trauma. She has an insatiable desire to find sexual satisfaction."

"I still don't see what you mean. What's wrong with wanting to find sexual satisfaction? And besides, I know from personal experience that she's not frigid. Just the opposite."

"What I mean is, the reason she has sex all the time is that she can't find anyone that suits her. Sometimes she thinks she's found someone, you for instance. But she soon realizes that she's wrong. So she tries to find somebody else. She's never satisfied. And because of her condition, she never will be. She'll wander around the rest of her life looking for just the right man, but she'll never find him."

"And you think this is what Julia is? How do you know so much?"

"David told us."

"And what makes him an authority? Is he some kind of psychiatrist? I've never seen his license."

"David didn't figure this out. Julia's mother told him."

"Well then that explains it," J.D. cried, jumping to his feet. "She hates Julia. She never stopped giving Julia a hard time the whole time we were in Arlington. I wouldn't believe a single word she said. She's vicious. She's like a snake. If she said it, I don't believe it."
"You have it all wrong," Tino said.

"How do I have it wrong? Have you ever met Julia's mother? No. But I have. I spent three days in the same house with her. I know what she's like. I know how she thinks. I don't believe a word of it."

"Maybe David got it from a bad source," Tino said. "But it's true anyway. All you have to do is look at the way she behaves. How many guys do you think she's slept with over the last year alone? Do you know? David knows. He knows because he's seen them all. She tells him all about her lovers, every one of them. He told us he told you all about those guys. Doesn't that mean anything to you? It's just not normal to sleep with that many different guys. Her mother may have been lying, but Julia's own actions speak for themselves."

"I don't want to hear anymore of this," J.D. said.

"Listen, I thought this was something you ought to know about. I wouldn't even have mentioned it if you hadn't said you were going to move in with her."

"Just leave her out of it."

"I just thought you ought to know. So now you know. I won't mention it again."

"You do that."

"Hey look, I was just trying to warn you. You're taking this thing too fast. I want you to be sure of what you're doing."

"You sound just like my father. Are you going to kick me out of the house next, and tell me to go join the Army?"
"I just wanted you to be sure of yourself. As long as you know all the facts before you get too deep into anything, you'll be all right."

"Just like my father, the bastard. He's worse than Julia's mother."

"I thought you always said that your parents were pretty cool."

"That's what I thought. I was wrong."

"They probably just couldn't handle Julia. She is pretty strange."

"What's so strange about her? Besides, just because somebody's a little strange doesn't mean you should kick her right out in the streets."

"Your parents were probably just mad at you. They'll get over it."

"No they won't. They were pretty serious. Besides, I don't need them. I don't have to go to them for handouts. I can make it on my own."

"Maybe so," Tino said.

"What do you mean maybe? I can do it."

"You probably can."

"Damn right I can. Who needs them?"

"Help me roll some more joints," Tino said. "There's going to be a big party tonight."

J.D. strained to see through the darkness. John, New York, and David had returned at dusk, but Julia had not.
Neither had James. John's brother had given them a ride.

"Where is Julia?" J.D. had asked.

"Downtown," New York said. "She wanted to stay."

"Was she by herself?"

"No, we left her with James," David said. "They were together down on Guadalupe Street."

"I thought she was going to visit some friends," J.D. said.

"She saw some people she knew," New York said.

"But she didn't talk to them much," David said.

"Most of the time she just followed James around," John said.

"They make a good pair," John's brother, Luke, had said. "They're both weird as hell."

"She told me to meet her down there about eight," J.D. said.

"She'll probably still be down there," David said. "She likes to hang around down there."

J.D. stood at the curb and stared down the street in the direction of town. It was nearly eight. Tino joined him.

"Do you still want to go down there?" Tino asked.

"Sure," J.D. said. "She told me to meet her at eight, so I'm going to meet her at eight."

"We better go then."

J.D. followed Tino to his car.
"Have you ever been down there before?" Tino said.

"No."

"It's a strange place. At one end of the street this afternoon there were these Jesus freaks yelling at everybody that the world was about to end. If we didn't repent we were going straight to hell. At the other end of the street were a bunch of guys with shaved heads wearing orange robes. They stood in a circle and chanted something. They were trying to give away pamphlets. All they wanted was money, though. They kept asking for donations."

"Sound like a bunch of rip-off artists to me."

"That's what I thought. But some of them looked pretty sincere."

"Sounds to me like they took you in."

"I didn't give them any money," Tino protested.

"You might next time."

"You'd have probably given them some money the first time."

"They wouldn't have fooled me."

"I know you," Tino said, starting the car. "You're gullible. You'll believe anything."

"I'm not gullible. I'm suspicious by nature. They wouldn't have gotten anything from me."

"I'll bet."

"I remember one time when a bunch of Jesus freaks stopped me on the campus. They kept bugging me, trying to convert me right there. I couldn't get away from them. One of them kept
saying, 'Jesus is Lord,' and another one kept saying, 'There's only one God.' I got fed up with them after a while. So the next time that guy said 'Jesus is Lord,' I said 'Then that must be me.' The guy looked horrified. The other guy perked right up and said, 'There's only one God.' So I said, 'Then I must be it.' You should have seen those guys creeping away. It was like the Devil himself was talking to them.'

Tino laughed. "Did you really say that?"

"Of course. You should have seen them. They never bothered me again."

Tino shook with laughter. "That's a good way to get rid of them."

"It works, that's for sure."

"I wish I'd known to say that this afternoon," Tino said. "It would have shut them up fast."

"They might have lynched me though."

"They would have been too surprised."

"They might have tried to send me to hell a little early," Tino laughed.

"It wouldn't have done you any harm. You'd like the warm weather."

Tino laughed heartily. J.D. joined him.

"I'm glad to see you laughing again," Tino said. "Ever since you started going with Julia you've been too serious."

J.D. sat silently.

"You ought to get away from her. She's a bad influence on you. Besides, I don't think she's being honest with you."
"What do you know about what she says to me?" J.D. said. "We get along pretty well. We have a lot in common. We have respect for each other. We're in love."

"What do you have in common?" Tino shot back. "Nothing, as far as I can see. I've never seen two people who are so different. And she lies to you. She lied to you this afternoon. She didn't go visit any friends. She went downtown with the boys. Why didn't she just tell you that that's what she was going to do? Why didn't she tell them to invite you? As a matter of fact she told them not to."

"I don't believe you."

"It's true. She told us not to bother you, that you were tired."

"She might have thought that; I was pretty stoned."

"She knew better. I was there. She snuck out of the house without you. She did it on purpose."

"I guess she deserves a little time to herself," J.D. said. "We've been together all the time for weeks."

"I think she's brushing you off."

"You think wrong. I know what she thinks. I know what she wants. You don't know her. Everything's cool."

"I thought you were naturally suspicious."

"I am. That's why I'm wondering why you're trying to make trouble between me and my girl."

"Hey, I'm not trying to make trouble. I'm trying to prevent something awful from happening."
"Something awful?"

"Look, you're an emotional person. I've seen you get upset lots of times over just petty little stuff. If she blows you off suddenly, like she probably will, you're liable to fly off the handle."

"I have everything under control," J.D. said. "I'm calm now, aren't I? If I was so emotional, I'd be pretty pissed off by now, don't you think?"

"I just wanted you to be prepared."

J.D. sat and said nothing. He raised his hand to scratch his forehead and he saw that his hand was shaking.

"Look," Tino said. "Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I don't know what I'm talking about."

"Then why are you bringing it up?"

"Because I'm your friend. Maybe the only one you have."

J.D. stared at him. "I have lots of friends. All those guys back at the house. All the people I know back in San Antonio. I have lots of friends."

Tino said nothing. They had reached the center of town. They passed the state capitol building.

"That's where the rally's going to be," Tino said.

"In the capitol?"

"No, out behind it, on the lawn."

A wide mall stretched out behind the capitol. The ground sloped downward from the street into a hollow, forming a natural stage at street level.
"The march will start at the university, march up Guadalupe and end here. There's going to be a lot of speeches from a bunch of different guys. It won't do any good, though. The only people who will be there will already be convinced. Everybody else will just think we're a bunch of assholes who should be thrown in jail."

"We have to make our feelings known," J.D. said.

"But this way isn't going to work," Tino said. "A lot of weirdos are going to show up, like those ones I was telling you about. It will be dismissed as just a bunch of loonies. Nobody's going to prove anything. This is the Drag," he said pointing out the window. "This is the street you always heard about."

The street was different from the way J.D. had imagined it. The university lay to the right. A tall building, more than twenty stories, sat at the beginning of the block on the right. It looked like a giant apartment house. A row of shops lined the left hand side of the street. In front of the shops was a wide sidewalk. Groups of people gathered around tables which were covered with homemade jewelry, the craftsman trying to coax them to buy. Others gathered around lone musicians sitting on the ground, playing and singing. One man with long red hair and wild eyes danced by the side of the road while playing a flute. He gestured to J.D. invitingly as they passed by. J.D. just stared at him, open-mouthed.
"Pretty strange place," Tino said.
"This place is crazy," J.D. said. "Did you see that guy with the flute?"
"He thinks he's the Pied Piper," Tino said. "We saw him yesterday. I think he's just trying to get chicks."
"It might work if he wasn't so strange looking."
"Some people go for that sort of thing."
"Will you shut up about that? I don't want to hear any more about it."

Tino pulled into a side street and parked the car.
"Make sure it's locked," he said. "Who knows what might get into it." They walked back to the main Drag. J.D. found himself in the midst of a crowd, watching a man and woman dancing wildly to music piped out the front of a store. Behind the dancers, he could see that the store was an all night record shop.

"Look at this," J.D. said to Tino. "A record store that stays open all the time."

"That's the biggest record store in the state," Tino said.

The dancers whirled to a stop. The crowd applauded wildly.

"This is only the beginning," Tino said. "People dance down here all night when it's warm."

J.D. stared transfixed as another couple began to dance. Tino pulled at his arm. "There's plenty more to see," he said.
J.D. left the dancing reluctantly. But he soon found himself in the middle of another crowd watching a band of the orange robed chanters Tino had told him about. They stood in a circle and chanted, their eyes lifted to the sky: "Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Hare Hare, Rama Rama." A young girl who looked to J.D. to be younger than himself handed him a small card. He noticed that she had a small ring passing through the side of her nose. After she had passed, he nudged Tino. "That girl has a pierced nose," he said, pointing her out.

"Lots of these Hare Krishnas have that," Tino said.

"You've seen it before?"

"Like I was telling you, we saw this bunch this afternoon."

J.D. turned and looked at the girl.

"She's very pretty," he said quietly.

"Come on," Tino said. "Let's find James. I'm afraid he might freak out in a crowd like this and do something crazy."

"He only freaks out when he's at home, in front of us," J.D. said. "I've never seen him do anything strange in class."

"Just the same, let's find him."

J.D. stuck the card the girl had given him absently in his pocket. He followed Tino as he pushed through the crowds.

"Most of these people seem to be here just to watch," J.D. said.

"They're just like us," Tino said. "They're spectators."
"I guess all these strange people like an audience," J.D. said.

"Sure, why not? They're all performers."

"How are we supposed to find Julia and James on a street this crowded?" J.D. said.

"It's just one street," Tino said. "We just walk up and down for a while and look in all the shops that are open. If they're here, we'll run into them eventually."

J.D. was content with this advice. How can anyone get lost on such a short street?

"There's a coffee house over across the street, too," Tino said. "In the Union building. We can look over there later."

"Maybe we should look there first," J.D. said. "Julia likes to go to coffee houses."

"Let's go to the end of the street and back first."

J.D. consented silently and followed Tino to the end of the street. Cars rolled by slowly as people stared at the crowds. On the way back up the street they stopped at a small cafe. James and Julia were not there. J.D. watched the crowds carefully. For a time they stopped and listened to a guitarist. J.D. felt restless. The lights above the street cast a dim glow across the way into the darkness of the university grounds.

"Come on," he said to Tino. "Let's go across the street and check out that coffee house."
Tino finally agreed. They waited at a crosswalk for the light to change.

"I still think we should look over here first. There are a lot more people on this side of the street than that."

"They're probably in that coffee house," J.D. said. "She likes coffee houses."

The light changed and they crossed. "Where is this place, anyway?" J.D. said.

"There," Tino said, pointing to a large building next to the street. "The coffee house is in through a side door."

Tino led the way. Before they were inside, J.D. could hear the music. The door was open to the warm night air. They stepped through the door and waited for their eyes to adjust. The only light in the room came from a spotlight trained on a girl in a floor length dress standing on a small makeshift stage in front of a microphone.

"She's a good singer," J.D. whispered.

"She's good looking, too," Tino whispered back.

J.D. tried to see the audience. "Let's go sit down," Tino said. They made their way through the dark. J.D. looked at the people sitting at each table to see if James and Julia were sitting there.

They found an empty table and sat down. J.D. soon became transfixed with the voice of the girl. He sat contentedly and watched her in the dim spotlight. She sang, and J.D. remembered a poem he had read once about a girl singing by the sea. He
liked the poem, even though he did not understand it. He liked it spontaneously, he thought; that is the way which poetry should be enjoyed.

The girl finished the song. She thanked the audience and stepped from the stage. J.D. followed after her with his eyes. As she sat down, he saw at the table beside her a couple with their heads close together, the girl with her hand on the boy's shoulder, she was whispering into his ear. He sat up suddenly. It was James and Julia.
CHAPTER XII

J.D. got up and walked over to James and Julia. Julia saw him coming and took her arm off of James's shoulder.

"We've been looking all over for you two," J.D. said.

"We've been in here for a while," Julia said.

"I wish I'd known that. Me and Tino have been walking up and down the street outside."

"How did you like it?"

"It was all right, I guess. I wish I'd known you were in here."

"We were just about to leave to see if we could find you," Julia said.

"We might as well go back to the house," J.D. said. "The party should be going pretty good by now."

"Yeah, the party," Julia said. "I forgot about that."

Tino came up by J.D.'s elbow. "So here they are."

"They were right here all the time," J.D. said.

"Let's go back to the house," Tino said to James. "They're waiting for us."

With a look of relief, James rose from his seat and silently followed Tino out of the door. J.D. sat down beside Julia.

"Did you see any of your friends?" J.D. said.
"What friends?"
"The friends you said you were going to visit this afternoon."
"No, I didn't go to see them."
"David said you saw some people you knew this afternoon."
"Yeah, I guess I did."
J.D. sat and looked at Julia. She stared down at the table, then over at the empty stage, then back down at the table.
"What are you staring at?" she said suddenly.
"Nothing, I'm not staring at anything."
"You were staring at me."
"I wasn't staring at you. I was just looking at you."
"So what's the difference?"
"I didn't mean anything by it."
"Let's get out of here." Julia bolted for the door. J.D. stumbled after her through the crowded room. He caught up to her outside of the door. She paused for a minute, then ran to the curb of the street and across to the other side. J.D. ran to keep up with her.
"What are you running for?" he shouted after her.
"What are you running for?" she called back to him.
"I can't keep up with you."
She slowed her pace to a walk. "You don't have to keep up with me if you don't want to," she said. "You can do whatever you want. You don't have to do what I'm doing."
"But I want to keep up with you."

"If that's what you want to do, fine. Just don't try to tell me what to do."

J.D. grabbed her by the arm and turned her toward him. "What's the matter? What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," she said. "Nothing's happened at all."

"Then why are you acting like this?"

"I told you nothing's happened. If you don't like the way I act, then that's too bad."

"Did James say something to you? What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. He never says anything. He never tries to tell anybody what to do."

"What are you talking about?"

"Will you stop trying to tell me what to do?" she screamed. "Don't try to tell me what to do."

Julia broke away from his grasp and walked away quickly. J.D. looked around and realized that there was a crowd watching. He turned and ran after her again. This time he caught up to her and walked at her side and said nothing. She turned down a side street. He followed her. She reached her car and opened the door.

"Do you want me to drive?" he asked.

"No, I'll drive."

He got in on the passenger side and waited quietly for her to speak first. She started the car and made a U-turn, winding through side streets. J.D. didn't know where they were.
"Where are we going?" he said finally.
"Back to the house," she replied. J.D. dropped the subject. He sat back and waited for them to arrive.

They finally reached a street J.D. was familiar with. It looked different at night, but it was the same street. Several cars were parked out in front of Luke's house.

"Looks like there's a lot of people here," J.D. said. Julia pulled up to the curb with a screech and jumped out. J.D. sighed and got out slowly. Whatever it is that's bothering her, he thought to himself, will burn itself out soon enough. I'll just have to wait.

He walked up to the house slowly and through the front door. He was immediately greeted by David, joint in hand.

"Have a toke of this," David said. J.D. took the joint half-heartedly and drew the smoke into his lungs.

"Did Julia come through here?" he said.
"She was in a hurry," David said. "I think she's in the back, playing the piano."

J.D. walked to the back of the house resignedly. James sat on the couch in the living room. Tino and New York stood over him.

"What's wrong with him?" J.D. said.
"He won't move," New York said.
"We had to carry him in from the car," Tino said.

J.D. waved his hand in front of James's face. His eyes did not blink. "Why is he doing that?" J.D. said.
"I don't know," Tino said. "He just got like that on the way here. When we got here he wouldn't move."

"We had to carry him," New York said.

"I said that," Tino said.

"Well, we did," New York said.

"He'll be all right after a while," J.D. said. "We just have to wait till it wears off."

"Till what wears off?" New York said. "What did he take?"

"He didn't take anything," Tino said. "It's just a mood. We'll have to wait for the mood to wear off."

"It looks like he took something to me," New York said.

"He didn't take anything," J.D. said. "He'll be all right after a while."

"I guess you're right," New York said.

"Where did Julia go?" J.D. said.

"She went in the back, I think," Tino said. "I think she wanted to play the piano back there."

J.D. walked to the back of the house and to the right. Opposite the kitchen was a room with big cushions spread on the floor and a piano in the corner. Julia sat at the piano, playing softly with her eyes closed. J.D. sat down on one of the cushions and listened quietly. He thought she was the most beautiful when she played the piano that way. He listened closely to the chords as she played them and improvised on them endlessly, finding new variations on the same series of notes. They were alone in the room. J.D. closed his own
eyes and leaned back against the cushions. The notes of the piano drifted through his mind.

J.D. heard footsteps at the door to the room. He opened his eyes and gazed upward. John loomed in the door. John looked at Julia as she played. An unpleasant look came across his face. John walked up behind Julia and grabbed her sternly by the elbows and pulled her hands away from the keyboard. Julia screamed and shook convulsively. J.D. sprang to his feet and pushed John away from her savagely.

"Just what the hell did you do that for?" J.D. demanded.

"Why the hell did you push me?" John yelled back.

"Can't you leave her alone?" J.D. breathed. "You didn't have to jerk her away from the piano like that."

"I want to know what makes you think you can just push me around like that?"

"Because you grabbed my girl."

"Your girl?" John laughed. "She's not your girl. She's everybody's girl. She's not your girl. She even fucks niggers."

J.D.'s fist came up and smashed into John's face. John fell backwards over a cushion and hit the wall. But he was on his feet faster than J.D. thought he could move. John grabbed J.D. around the waist and shoved him backwards. J.D.'s head slammed into the wall. J.D. swung his fists wildly. Most of the blows glanced off of John's back. John twisted J.D. around into the center of the room and dropped down to hold J.D. around the knees. With his legs pinned together, J.D.
stumbled and fell over onto his back. John sprang on top of him. J.D. raised his hands to cover his face. Blows slammed into the side of his head.

John unexpectedly jerked up and off J.D. J.D. took his hands from his face and saw that Tino and New York held John back. He noticed blood on the back of his hand. He rose slowly and dragged himself from the room. He crossed the living room and went out the front door. The living room was full of people. They stopped talking and stared at J.D. as he came through the room. J.D. said nothing to them. He tried to hide his face until he was outside.

He breathed in deeply the cool night air. A sharp pain stabbed him in the cheek. He put his hand to his mouth. More blood. The taste of blood in his mouth. Blood. The blood of the fallen warrior. The taste of defeat. The wages of sin.

His eyes shut involuntarily from the pain in his head. He became dizzy. He reached the curb and leaned against a car. He sat down clumsily on the curb.

He sat there for some time, his head in his hands. He felt something touch his arm. He looked up slowly. Julia pressed a damp cloth to his mouth.

"This should help," she said.

J.D. took hold of the cloth and held it against his mouth.

"That bastard," she said. "He had no right doing that, no right at all."

"He shouldn't have said that," J.D. muttered through the cloth.
"Said what?" she asked.
"Said what he said about you."

"Who cares what he said," Julia said. "He pulled me away from the piano. He pulled me away from my music. I mean, I was really getting into it and he stopped me. That bastard. You should have killed him."

J.D.'s head hurt. "Do I look all right?" he asked.
"You're beginning to get a black eye," she said. "I can't tell about the rest of you in the dark."

"What should we do now?"

"Let's go for a ride. We don't have to come back here. Everything's still in the car. We can find someplace else to stay."

"Tino tried to stop me," J.D. said aloud.

"He wasn't even in the room," Julia said. "I told you I didn't like these stupid jerks. The only one who is worth anything at all is James."

"He tried to warn me."

"We can just drive around for a while and then find a place to stay for the night. We don't have to put up with this."

She helped him to his feet and into the car. She got in behind the wheel and started the engine. "We'll just ride around for a while till I think of someplace to go," she said. "We don't have to go back there."
J.D. leaned back into the seat and closed his eyes. His body shifted back and forth limply as Julia drove swiftly through the streets. He settled himself and fell asleep.

When J.D. woke up, the sky was gray with daylight. The sun lay just beneath the edge of the horizon. He shook his head and reeled under the tremendous pain. His muscles were cramped and stiff. Without opening his eyes he opened the door and stepped out of the car and stretched. The blood surged through the back of his head. He leaned his head back into the car to speak to Julia. She was not there. He stood up straight and looked around. He didn't know where he was. It was a quiet residential street. The car was parked in front of an empty lot. Across the street was a new but fairly run down duplex. The lawn had not been cut for some time. Weeds grew up in crazy, wild patterns. J.D. got back in the car and sat with his eyes shut. He fell back asleep.

"Wake up J.D.," Julia said. She shook him by the arm.

J.D. sat up. The sun was well up in the sky. The bright light pierced him through the eyes and struck the back of his head. The pain nearly made him pass out. He reached back and touched the back of his head lightly. It was badly swollen.

"Where are we?" J.D. said.
"We're at a friend of mine's house," Julia said.

"What time is it?"

"About one, I would think. You were asleep for a long time."

J.D. opened the door and got out of the car slowly. Julia took him by the arm and led him across the street to the unkempt duplex. He stopped halfway across the lawn. He was very dizzy. He hung onto Julia's arm tightly as the sky wheeled in a great circle, slipping underneath him. The earth came up suddenly and crashed into him. He closed his eyes and passed out.

When he awoke again, it was dark. He lay in a bed in a barren room. A single dim light burned on a small table across on the other side of the room.

J.D. could not open his left eye. He glanced around the room with his right, not remembering where he was. The back of his head pulsed fiercely.

As he was about to get up, Julia came into the room and sat on the edge of the bed.

"We were just about to take you to the hospital," Julia said. "We didn't know if you were going to wake up or not."

"I must have passed out."

"You went out cold right out there in the front yard. You've been out for hours."

"My head hurts pretty bad."
"We've been putting ice on your eye. It's turned blue, but it still looks better than this afternoon."

"Get me some aspirin."

Julia got up from the bed and left the room. A moment later she came back with the aspirin and a glass of water. A tall Black woman followed her into the room. J.D. took the aspirin and lay back on the bed. He looked at the pair with his one good eye.

"Are you gonna be all right?" the Black woman asked.

"I guess so," J.D. said. "Where are we?"

"This is Sandy," Julia said. "Do you remember me talking about Cory? This is his sister."

"Is he here too?"

"We're the only ones here," Sandy said.

"Cory's in Houston," Julia said. "I just called him and talked to him on the phone."

"Maybe you should get some ice for the back of my head," J.D. said.

Sandy left the room. Julia sat down on the edge of the bed.

"You're really a mess," she said.

"Thanks a lot."

"I didn't mean anything by it," she said. "You didn't have to get into that fight. Violence isn't the right way."

"I just did it for you," J.D. said.
"Don't you see," she said. "We came down here this weekend to try to stop violence. Maybe you were upset at the time, but you should have tried to stop yourself from doing anything like that."

"After what he said about you, you can talk like that? This morning you were ready to kill him yourself."

"But I was able to control myself."

"Why don't we call your friend in here and ask her what she would have done if somebody said that about her."

"Shhh," Julia whispered. "Don't say anything about it to her."

"OK," J.D. said. "I still think there's nothing I could have done different. I had to do what I did."

Sandy came back into the room carrying an icebag. Julia gently laid the bag against the back of J.D.'s head.

"Are you hungry," she said.

"No," J.D. said. "Maybe later."

"You should call a cop to get that guy," Sandy said.

"Let's leave them out of it," Julia said. "Cops don't do anybody any good. They do nothing but hassle you and tell you what to do. We're not calling any cops."

"It doesn't matter," J.D. said. "I hit him first."

"You ought to be more careful who you hit," Sandy said.

"I didn't think about that," J.D. said.

Sandy left the room again. J.D. heard a TV go on.
"Tomorrow we'll go down and get the room that Bucky promised us," Julia said. "By Sunday we'll be back in Denton and everything will be all right."

"Maybe we should just drive back tomorrow and not stay."

"If you don't feel like staying when we get up in the morning, we'll drive back to my parents' house in Arlington. We couldn't go back to Denton until Sunday. Nothing's going to be open till then."

"OK," J.D. said. "We'll wait till tomorrow."

After a while, J.D. felt strong enough to get up. Julia led him to a small kitchen through a living room where Sandy sat watching TV. Julia fixed him something to eat. She sat and watched him as he put the food into his mouth carefully. A sharp pain stabbed the inside of his cheeks.

"I feel better already," J.D. said. "I guess I'm not as bad off as I thought."

"You were out for eight hours. It scared me."

"I'll probably be all right now."

"It scared me while you were just laying there, though. I kept wanting to try to wake you up, but Sandy told me to just leave you alone. We were just about to take you to the hospital."

"Where's a mirror?" J.D. asked.

Julia showed him where the bathroom was. J.D. looked at himself in the mirror. There was a small cut over his right eye. The brow was swollen and had turned black. It bulged
over his eye and blocked his vision. His cheeks were also swollen. J.D. pulled open his mouth carefully and saw that his teeth had cut into the inside of his cheeks deeply on both sides, causing the swelling. He tried to twist his head around to see the back but could make out nothing. Julia leaned up and looked at the back intently.

"It just seems to be a lump," she said. "No cut. Just a big bruise."

"Maybe I have a concussion," J.D. said.

"I don't think so," Julia said. "Those are pretty bad. You wouldn't be able to get up and walk around."

"I couldn't this morning."

They went out to the living room. J.D. tried to watch TV. He couldn't concentrate. Julia and Sandy talked about friends of theirs from Houston. J.D. tried to listen but couldn't. He felt confused. He couldn't remember what day it was or how many days they had been away from school.

Sandy soon said goodnight and went to bed.

"We might as well go to bed, too," J.D. said. "I still feel pretty groggy."

They went back to the room where J.D. had been before. Once in bed with the lights out, J.D. fell asleep immediately.
CHAPTER XIII

When J.D. awoke it was early afternoon. Julia lay curled away from him on the other side of the bed. He rose from the bed and went to the bathroom. He passed Sandy's bedroom on the way. It was empty. She was not in the house.

J.D. looked at himself in the mirror. The swelling over his eye had gone down quite a bit. He could see well enough now. The brow was still enlarged, and the side of his face was now almost completely black. I wonder how James manages to look wild all the time, he thought to himself. He tried to imitate the way James looked in the mirror. He bulged out his eyes and dropped his mouth open. The pain from his eye made him wince. It is something like that, he thought, fear maybe.

He went back to the bedroom and got dressed slowly. Julia did not stir. He then went to the kitchen and looked in the refrigerator. He took out a carton of milk and took a drink directly from it. The sharp pain inside his mouth had turned to a dull ache.

J.D. went back to the bedroom and woke Julia up.

"It's nearly one o'clock."

"Sandy should be home any time," Julia said, stretching.

"She gets off work about now."

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"Do we have to get out before she comes back?"
"No, we really should wait until she gets home."
"What are we going to do this afternoon?" J.D. asked.
"We're going downtown to the headquarters. We're going to see what the plans for the march are. We're going to get a room for tonight and tomorrow."
"Why can't we just stay here?"
"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."
"Why not?"
"Listen, John's brother didn't get that great big house by selling a few lids on the side. He's a big time operator."
"What's he got to do with it?"
"He's violent. He worked his way to the top by pushing other people out of the way."
"I still don't see how that makes a difference."
"Everybody in this town knows who he is. Everybody dealing in drugs, anyway. Even Sandy knows who he is."
"I give up," J.D. said. "I don't want to know why we can't stay here."
"Because Sandy's afraid they might try to kill you."
J.D. stared at Julia. "Kill me? You mean John and Luke? For getting into a fight I didn't even win?"
"It sounds silly," she admitted. "But it doesn't sound silly to Sandy."
"So she'd rather not have us around."
"I don't want to tell her what to do. It's her house."
"It doesn't matter. If Bucky found us a room, it doesn't matter."

"That's what I thought. But she wanted us to stick around until she got home so that she's sure we're all right."

"Fine. She's an outstanding human being."

Despite the throbbing in his head, J.D. felt a rise of desire surge through him as he looked at Julia lying naked in bed. He sat down on the bed and reached for her, but she pushed him away and slid out of reach and quickly dressed. J.D. sat glumly on the bed and watched.

"We have to get our things into the car and get ready to go," she said. "Sandy should be here soon."

Sandy did not come by two. Julia wrote a note and left it on the kitchen table.

"When she sees the note, she won't be worried," Julia said. "It was kind of silly in the first place."

J.D. felt up to driving. Julia sat by and gave directions. The day was hot, above ninety degrees. J.D. did not like the smell of himself or his clothes. He didn't say anything, but he thought that Julia smelled even worse. What the hell, he thought to himself. It's a hot day.

They were soon in the center of the city. J.D. found a parking place a couple of blocks off the Drag. They got out of the car and walked down to the busy street. J.D. tried to put his arm around Julia but she pushed it away. "It's too hot," she said. J.D. accepted the explanation silently.
The headquarters of the Student's March Against the War was on the second story above a small cafe across from the Union building. Large signs bearing the name of the organization and slogans were prominently displayed in the windows. They easily found the stairs and went up.

All around them was a flurry of activity. Large signs and banners protesting death, war, and atrocity were being painted by students about J.D.'s age. Other older students were standing and sitting in a circle in a room to one side. Bucky stood in the middle of the circle.

"They're the leaders," Julia said with awe. "They're planning strategy."

J.D. looked around for someone they knew. He recognized no one.

"Stay here," Julia said. She edged forward into the room in which the leaders were. J.D. stood and watched her disappear around the corner of the door. He got restless standing in one place and began to walk around the rooms. A young girl looked up from the posters she was painting.

"Would you like to help?" she offered.

"Sure."

"You can help me do these signs if you like," she said. J.D. got down on his knees next to the girl. She handed him a paint brush and pointed to a stack of empty placards and a can of paint.

"What should the signs say?"
"'Stop the War' would be all right," she said. "Or 'Hell no, we won't go.' Look around and get some ideas."

J.D. began to paint the signs slowly. He glanced over his shoulder from time to time to see if Julia had come out of the room and was looking for him. He did not see her.

"What happened to your eye?" the girl asked.

"A guy beat me up," J.D. said.

"Was he a cop?"

"No," J.D. said, surprised. "Why would a cop beat me up?"

The girl rolled her eyes. "Come on," she said. "You can't trust the pigs. They'd bash your head in if they got the chance."

"Did that ever happen to you?"

"No, but this friend of mine got beat up by the cops once. He was just walking down the street and they came along and beat the crap out of him, then just left him there. He wasn't doing anything."

"That's awful."

"Why did the guy beat you up?"

"We had an argument."

"What about?"

"He called my girl friend a name. I didn't want to fight him, though. I just stood my ground and didn't do anything. I'm a pacifist. I would never fight anybody."

"Wow," the girl said. "You just stood there and let him hit you?"
"I didn't have much choice, I had to stand up to him."
"You're pretty brave," she said. "Braver than I'll ever be. It looks like he caught you pretty good. Do you want some ice to put on it? There's some ice in the back."
"It's all right now," J.D. said. "It happened a couple of days ago."
"It was worse than it is now? He must have nearly killed you."
"It's not that bad."
"The whole side of your face is black. There's even some red in the white part of your eye."
J.D. hadn't noticed the broken blood vessel in his eye. He reached up and touched the side of his face.
"It's not so bad. It hardly hurts at all any more."
"You really have guts," she said. "My name's Susie."
J.D. looked up from his work and saw that she had extended her hand. He took it awkwardly. "I'm J.D."
"I'm very glad you came," she said. She did not let his hand go, but held onto it gently. J.D. looked at her closely for the first time. She's actually very pretty, he thought to himself. She was thin and blond and about his age. Maybe some other time, he thought, they might have had a chance.
"How many people are going to march tomorrow?" J.D. said, pulling his hand away slowly.
"Oh, thousands," she said. "People have been coming and going around here like crazy all week."
"All week." J.D. echoed.

"This should be the best rally we've ever had."

"The best ever."

"That's what Bucky says."

"Do you know Bucky?"

"Sure, doesn't everybody?"

"I guess so."

"He was right in the next room a while ago."

"He's still there."

"Not anymore," she said. "He got up and left. I saw him."

J.D. put down the brush hurriedly and ran to the door of the room.

"Hey, where are you going, J.D.?" Susie called after him.

J.D. did not turn. The room was empty. He ran down the hall and looked in the other rooms of the loft. He searched frantically. Julia was gone.

He headed down the stairs. When he reached the street, he looked around wildly. She was gone. She had left him there by himself. The only thing to do was wait for her to come back, he thought. She must have gone on an errand for somebody and would be back soon. Or maybe she went to visit some friends. Maybe she went back to Sandy's house to reassure her.

J.D. climbed back up the stairs sullenly. He returned to the work of painting the signs.

"What did you run off like that for?" the girl asked.
"My girl was in there talking to Bucky," J.D. said. "At least I thought she was. I don't know where she is now."

"You ought to dump her," Susie said. "She seems to be more trouble than she's worth."

"We belong to each other," J.D. said. "I don't have to worry about her."

Susie shook her head. "Men," she said.

J.D. spent the entire afternoon painting signs. As dusk began to settle, lights were turned on in the room. J.D. had worked for many hours without stopping, working in a suspended period of time and space. The dusk and the lights startled him.

"What time is it?" he asked Susie in agitation.

"Six o'clock. Want to go get something to eat?"

"I have to go find somebody," J.D. said. "Maybe I'll see you later." J.D. ran down the stairs back out into the street. He walked quickly up toward where they had left the car. It was still there. J.D. sighed in relief. She must still be somewhere on the Drag. Maybe she saw somebody she knew. If she was nearby, he had nothing to worry about.

He went back to the Drag. The Hare Krishnas were back. They stood by the curb, chanting. J.D. walked in the other direction. He bumped into someone. He was grabbed by the arm.

"J.D.," Tino said. "I've been looking for you for two days."

"Tino!" J.D. cried. His smile brought a sharp stab of pain. He winced and held the side of his head.
"It looks like you really took a pounding," Tino said. "We didn't know it was that bad."

"I practically slept the whole time until this morning. I thought my head would burst."

"It looks like it's getting better," Tino said. "Julia took care of me," J.D. said. "You really don't understand her."

"She was pretty pissed off when she left," Tino said. "I've never seen anybody so mad. She kept screaming about having the soul of a musician or something. I didn't understand what she was talking about."

"I'll explain it to you sometime."

"Let's go find New York and James. They came down this afternoon. I just got here."

"I've been up there all afternoon," J.D. said, pointing to the loft where the anti-war headquarters were. "I've been painting signs with this good-looking chick."

"You're really committed to this thing, aren't you?"

"Sure," J.D. said. "What about it?"

"I thought we were coming down here just to party. You really came down for the march."

"I guess I started out just wanting to party, but I changed my mind someplace along the way."

"You're unbelievable."

"I believe me."

Tino laughed and slapped him on the back. J.D. winced, but he laughed too.
"Just where is Julia?" Tino said.

"I don't know exactly," J.D. said. "She's somewhere around here. The car's right up that side street there, right where we parked it."

"You need to get away from her for a while, anyway," Tino said. "Get out and get some room to breathe on your own."

They walked up the street through the crowd. Many more people were on the street that night than two nights earlier. Crowds of high school age kids thronged around the storefronts and across the sidewalk.

"Why are all these people here?" J.D. asked.

"It's Friday. Lots of high school people come down here on Friday night. Didn't you ever come here when you were in high school?"

"No," J.D. said. "I never got around to it."

They elbowed their way by the all night record shop. They stopped and watched the dancers.

"I could really use something to eat," J.D. said when the song was over.

"Let's walk down to the end of the street," Tino said. "There's a MacDonalds down there."

They walked down the street away from downtown, away from the crowds. The MacDonalds was around a slight bend in the road. They were no longer across from the university. J.D. felt uncomfortable to be out of familiar territory. They bought hamburgers and sat down to eat.
"Where are you going to be tomorrow?" Tino said.

"I don't know. Down by the capitol building all day, I guess. I don't know what Julia wants to do yet."

"You don't have to stick with her," Tino said. "You can ride back to Denton with me, if you want."

"We've been through all this before," J.D. said wearily. "Let's just drop it."

"So where do you think she'll want to be tomorrow?"

"I don't know where she'll want to be," J.D. said. "I give up," Tino said.

They ate their food quietly and walked back up to the Drag. J.D. began to become numb to the crowds. He pushed against it halfheartedly. He became separated for a moment from Tino and turned around to look for him. The wild long-haired flute player stood before him. He stepped off the curb and beckoned to J.D. J.D. paused and stared at him. He took a step to follow. Suddenly Tino grabbed him by the arm and swung him around.

"Where are you going?" Tino said. "You'll get run over."

"That guy with the flute," J.D. said, turning back and pointing. But he was gone. "He must have slipped back into the crowd."

"Come on," Tino said. "I think I know where we can find New York."

Tino led the way. J.D. followed him, but he kept glancing back over his shoulder. Tino cut up a side street and into an old house which had been converted into a head shop.
"New York said he was coming down here," Tino said. "He might be here now."

They pushed open the door and stepped inside. A dim light revealed a few meager shelves of grimy merchandise. Many people stood around looking at pipes and posters. New York was leaning over the counter talking to the clerk.

"And how much for that one?" he was saying.

The clerk took a pipe from under the glass case. It was tall and shaped like the letter J made of clear glass. The bowl was large and set at the top of the shorter end of the J.

"You fill this lower part up with water," the clerk said. "Or even wine. Then when you suck on this end, the smoke passes through the water, cooling it off. If you use wine, it will taste like wine."

New York looked at the pipe. Tino walked up behind him and slapped him on the back. J.D. grabbed his arm and twisted it playfully up behind his back.

"This is a bust," J.D. said in a low voice.

New York spun around awkwardly and freed his arm. He grinned when he saw J.D. and Tino.

"You had me scared there for a minute," New York said.

"I thought you might be here," Tino said.

"We've been looking for you and James," J.D. said.

"He went off with Julia," New York said. "She dragged him off, really."
"Where did they go?" J.D. said.

"I don't know. Up the street somewhere."

"Let's get out of here," J.D. said.

"I want to buy this pipe," New York said.

"Let's go find them," J.D. said.

J.D. headed for the door. Tino followed. New York stayed at the counter. J.D. walked quickly back to the Drag. Tino had to run to keep up.

"I know where they are," J.D. said. "They're back at that coffee house."

"Leave them alone," Tino said. "She's not worth it."

J.D. wheeled to face Tino. "Quit following me around," he said. "All you do is bad mouth Julia. I'm tired of it."

J.D. turned and stalked off. Tino shook his head and watched him disappear into the crowd.

J.D. elbowed his way back up the street in the direction of the Union building. He fought blindly to free himself from the pull of the throng around him. It seemed to be holding him back, keeping him from the place he wanted to go.

When he was even with the Union building, he stopped and waited for the light to change to cross the street. Someone touched him on the arm and slowly nudged him around. J.D. shook his arm away and stepped off the curb.

"J.D.!" Julia called from behind him.

J.D. turned and looked at Julia. She stood on the curb holding her hand out to him. He reached out and took her
hand and followed her docilely and proudly through the crowd.

"Where have you been?" she said. "I came looking for you hours ago back at the headquarters. They said you jumped up and went tearing off for some reason."

"I was looking for you."

"I thought you'd wait for me to come back. I wasn't gone long."

"You were gone all afternoon."

"I went to see some friends. I lost track of time."

"Anybody I know?"

"No."

She led him back to the loft where the headquarters were. When they reached it she began searching through the rooms.

"What are you looking for?" J.D. said.

"Bucky," she said. "I still haven't found out where this room is that he promised us."

They found Bucky in the same room they had seen him in that afternoon. He sat by himself at a small table, a legal pad in front of him. Julia walked up to him. She motioned to J.D. to step back outside the room. J.D. stepped out and wandered back to the room where he had been painting the posters. The young blond girl was still there.

"Did you find your girl?" Susie said.

"Yes," J.D. said.
"That's too bad," she said. "You're kind of cute."
J.D. smiled. He sat down next to her.
"They promised us a room for tonight," J.D. said. "She's finding out where it is."
"I'd give you a place to stay," she said.
"For the two of us?" J.D. asked, pointing toward the other room.
"Just you."
"I can't."
Susie went back to painting. Julia appeared at the door and waved him over. J.D. got up off the floor and walked over.
"Where are we going?"
"A place not far from here," she said. They went back down to the street. The crush of the street was heavy. J.D. was anxious to get away. Julia led the way back to the car.
"Did you eat?" she said.
"Yes."
"I'm hungry. Let's go get something."
"Can we go somewhere away from here?" J.D. said.
"I thought you liked it here."
"It's starting to bother me."
Julia shrugged. When they reached the car she slid into the driver's side and started the engine. She drove north, away from the university and the crowds.
"There's a small place up this way I used to go to when I was in school. They have the best hamburgers in the world there."
She went on talking idly. J.D. did not pay any attention. He looked out the window glumly and said nothing.

They reached the hamburger place and went inside. J.D. ordered a coke and watched Julia devour her meal. They sat by the window. J.D. looked out forlornly. He noticed his reflection in the window. The black side of his face shown clearly. He looked at himself closely and carefully and he saw how tired he was and then he felt how tired he was. He felt as if he hadn't slept in days despite all of the sleep he had gotten. His head hurt dully and he wanted to lie down.

"What time is it?" he said finally.

"Ten or thereabouts."

"Let's find this place and crash," J.D. said. "I feel tired."

"How could you be tired?" she said. "You've been asleep for two days."

"I don't feel too good, I guess. I just want to crash."

"I want to go for a ride," she said.

"I guess that would be all right," he said. "I'm just tired."

They went out to the car and got in. J.D. slumped down in the seat and stared out the car window. Julia drove out to the edge of town and out into the country. The road wound up and down through small hills and along the side of small cliffs. J.D. looked out over the cliffs at the small lights
of distant houses. The sky was clear. The stars seemed to continue down below the indistinct horizon. J.D. felt as if they were flying through the air. He became dizzy. He lay his head back and closed his eyes. He soon drifted off to sleep.

He awoke with a start. Julia had stopped the car in front of an apartment house.

"This is where our room is," she said. "Bucky gave me the key."

J.D. nodded. They got out of the car.

"Bring the stuff for overnight," she said. J.D. rummaged in the back seat and brought out two small bags. He followed her as she led the way inside. They had no trouble finding the right room. She tried the key in the lock and the door opened.

The room was very dirty. There was no furniture except a small table with a broken leg and a single bed with a worn mattress.

"Not exactly high class," J.D. said.

"We have to sacrifice in times like these," she said. "Men are sleeping and dying in a lot worse places than this."

J.D. felt guilty. His head hurt. The room was warm. It smelled.

"Open a window," Julia said. The windows were blocked by venetian blinds. J.D. pushed them aside. The windows were tall and thin and swung open only a few inches. A
slight draft of cool air came in from outside. J.D. stood by the window and breathed the fresh air.

"It's going to be crowded on that bed," Julia said.

"I don't care," J.D. said. "I'm tired."

Julia looked in the small bathroom. "There's a shower in here," she said. "Let's both take showers and cool off before we go to bed."

J.D. took off his clothes slowly and went into the shower. The water came out in a slow stream. It felt good against his skin. There was no soap or towels. He dried himself on a dirty T-shirt and lay on the bed. He closed his eyes and tried to go back to sleep.

He listened to the water splash in the shower. He tried to imagine what Susie would look like without her clothes. I should have gone home with her, he thought to himself. He felt guilt immediately for this infidelity. He tried to wipe the memory of her out of his mind.

Julia came out of the shower. Her bare feet padded across the floor and stopped somewhere on the other side of the room. J.D. opened his eyes and looked at her. She stood at the window, looking out, drying herself with the T-shirt.

"Come to bed." J.D. said.

"In a minute."

J.D. closed his eyes again. In a few minutes his mind began to drift. He soon fell asleep.
J.D. opened his eyes as the sun burst into the room and fell across the bed. Julia stood in the same spot as before, but now it was day. He sat up and looked at her, softly glistening in the bright sunshine. She turned and looked at him.

"So you're awake," she said. "Get up. It's time to go."

J.D. looked at his clothes thrown haphazardly on the floor. He rose slowly and put them on. Julia had taken another shower. She put on her clothes quickly. She gathered their few things together and waited for him impatiently. He went in the bathroom and shut the door. And so the day has come, he said quietly to the mirror. The day of the march. The shape of his face seemed to have changed. It seemed to be longer, less round than it used to be. There was a faint dark hollow under each eye. The distention around the eye which had been swollen shut was completely gone.

I look older than I did last week, he thought. Much older.

He came out of the bathroom. Julia burst from the room out into the hall. J.D. trailed her slowly. She got well ahead of him and waited for him impatiently at the car. When he got there and put his bag in, she locked it.

"Aren't we going down to the march?" J.D. said.
"We're only a couple of blocks away from the Drag," she said. "We can walk."

"I don't know where we are," he said. "I was asleep."
Julia started off at a fast pace.
"Are we late?" J.D. said.
"Yes."

"We don't have to be there from the beginning. We can get there anytime we want."
Julia slowed her pace reluctantly. J.D. tried to put his arm around her. She shrugged it off.
"It's too hot," she said.
J.D. fell in a step behind her. He watched her walk. He liked the way she walked.

People filled the wide sidewalk on Guadalupe Street. J.D. and Julia elbowed their way to the headquarters. They mounted the stairs, but the loft was empty.

"The march is supposed to start over on campus," Julia said. "We'll go over there."

They again went down to the street and crossed to the university side. J.D. fell behind and sat down on a low cement wall. Julia turned and stared at him.
"Come on," she said. "What are you sitting there for?"
"I don't feel like marching," he said. "You go ahead. When they come by here, I'll join you."

She came back and sat beside him. "Maybe it's a good idea to wait," she said. "It's hot today."
J.D. looked across Guadalupe Street lazily. The people were milling about. They looked restless and expectant. Around the corner of the Union building came the faint sound of chanting. J.D. cocked his ear and listened.

"Hell no, we won't go. Hell no, we won't go!"

The vanguard of the march swung into view. A large banner was held aloft which read "STOP THE WAR." Behind the banner a crowd of maybe two hundred huddled together, chanting and holding clenched fists aloft.

"HELL NO, WE WON'T GO! HELL NO, WE WON'T GO!"

They marched resolutely by in front of J.D. and Julia out into the street. A few policemen waited there, stopping traffic. The march swung to the left in the direction of the capitol building and disappeared down the Drag. The people on the sidewalks watched for a moment, satisfied with the novelty. Some even joined in the march, delighting in the defiance of walking down the middle of the street. J.D. looked closely to see if there was anyone he knew marching. There was no one.

After the march was out of sight, he turned to Julia.

"Should we go over and watch the speeches?"

"I suppose," she said.

They walked slowly back to the car and drove downtown to the capitol building. They found a parking space easily. Everyone had parked near the beginning of the march, J.D. thought.
A PA system had been set up on the sidewalk. Speakers stood at a microphone, facing the small crowd below them in the hollow. Many people had brought picnic lunches and were prepared to stay all day. J.D. sat down and leaned against a tree to one side of the speakers. Julia stood beside him.

"I see some people I know," she said after a moment. "I'm going to talk to them."

J.D. watched her go. She greeted a couple about a hundred feet away. They were surprised and happy to see her. She sat beside them. They talked animatedly.

J.D. listened to the speakers. Rabble rousers, most of them. No rabble to rouse. Everybody's tired of this protest business. It had been four years since Chicago. The Chicago Seven trial was over, their convictions already overturned. The war was winding down. It would be over soon, J.D. believed. There was an election coming up.

Most of the speakers didn't even talk about the war. They all represented different groups. Gays talked about gays. Women talked about women. They didn't even mention the war. Hell no, I won't go. I won't have to.

J.D. glanced back to where he had seen Julia sit down. The couple was still there but she was gone. I should have kept my eye on her, he thought. She's disappeared again. He scanned the crowd. Again he recognized no one. He sighed heavily. He was alone.

He listened to the speeches for many hours. The war was destroying the country from within. The evidence was
all around. The wounded were sprawled before him. The speeches continued to be listless. The sun began to sink in the sky. He thought of hitchhiking back to Denton. The hell with that. I might as well go to California.

Late in the afternoon, the rally began to break up. J.D. got up from beneath the tree and stretched. He walked back to where they had left the car. To his surprise, it was still there. He was more surprised when Julia came walking toward him from the other direction.

"The speeches were boring," J.D. said. "I don't blame you for leaving."

"I ran into a friend of mine, and he wanted to go smoke a joint."

"You had a better time than I did," J.D. sighed. They got in the car and drove away.

They went back to the room and got cleaned up. They stopped along the way and bought shampoo, soap, and two towels. The soap was refreshing. J.D. combed his clean hair after his shower and rubbed the towel against his skin and smiled at himself in the mirror. He felt better.

Afterward he lay down on the bed with his head propped up and looked at the narrow windows as the light faded. Julia came out of the shower, her hair wet, and dressed quickly.

"I don't care anymore," J.D. said.

"About what?" Julia said.
He looked at her as she combed her hair.

"What did we accomplish out there today? I don't think anyone was paying any attention."

"They were paying attention, all right," she said. "They better pay attention, or else."

"Or else what?" J.D. said. "Or else we kill them? Isn't that against our principles?"

"We don't have to kill anyone. They'll kill themselves. Just wait and see."

"I don't care if they kill themselves just so long as they don't kill me first."

"You just have to watch yourself," she said.

"I guess I don't care about that either."

She combed her hair. The fading light came through the window and revealed her in silhouette. She put the comb aside and came over and sat on the edge of the bed.

"You don't care about anything?" she asked.

J.D. shook his head.

"Not even me?"

J.D. looked at her. A tear trickled down her cheek. Or maybe it was a drop of water from her hair.

"Yes," he said. "I care about you. I care only about you."

They went out and got something to eat. They said nothing. Julia again wanted to go for a ride. She drove through the
hills again, much as she had the night before. J.D. stayed awake and stared out the window at the sky. The stars looked the same, but he no longer felt he was a part of them. He was no longer among them, within them. He felt empty inside.

That night he slept fitfully. Once he awoke and watched the sleeping form beside him. He sat up on the edge of the bed and wept. She did not wake up.

The next morning they awoke about eleven. They packed their things and left the room. J.D. drove down to the Drag and waited in the car as Julia dropped the key to the room at the headquarters. When she came back, he guided the car back to the interstate and north toward home.

J.D. drove without haste. He saw only the road in front of him. After a few hours, Julia fell asleep in the seat beside him, laying her head in his lap affectionately. He felt warm inside. The march was over. Vacation was over. Their trip was over.

He came through Fort Worth at five in the afternoon. He could see the tall buildings of Denton several miles before they arrived. When he reached his own familiar dorm, he felt as if he had returned from an odyssey of many years. He stopped the car and turned off the engine.

He shook Julia awake.

"We're home," he said.

She sat up and looked around. "Let's get my things out of the car."
It didn't take long. J.D. noticed that Tino's orange Vega was in the parking lot.

"Looks like those four guys are already back," he said, pointing to the car.

"Who cares?" she said quickly. "Listen, I'll be back later. I want to unpack my things and get cleaned up."

"I guess I'll see you after a while."

"I'll be back after dinner."

She got in the car and drove away. J.D. climbed the stairs to his room and closed the door behind him. He stood in the middle of the room and looked around him. Everything he owned was within view. He picked up his guitar like an old friend and sat down by the window and played.
CHAPTER XIV

J.D. put the guitar aside and looked out the window. It was completely dark. Several hours had gone by and Julia had not returned. He sat by the window and looked out into the night. He hadn't bothered to turn on the light to his room. He guessed suddenly that Julia had come by and seen the window of his room dark and had not bothered to come up. He leaped from the bed and turned on the light.

A moment later there was a knock on the door. J.D. hurried to open it. It was Tino. He stepped inside tentatively.

"I saw your light go on, so I thought I'd come up," Tino said. "I didn't know if you made it back from Austin yet."

"I'm back," J.D. said, sitting down again by the window. Tino sat on a chair across from J.D.

"I thought maybe I'd see you at supper, but you weren't there."

"I haven't eaten yet."

"Maybe you want to go get something."

"I am kind of hungry."

"So what are we waiting for?" Tino said, standing up.

"I was waiting for Julia," J.D. said. "She was supposed to come by and pick me up a while ago."
"Let's go get something to eat," Tino said. "I don't think she's going to come by any time soon."

"I told her I'd wait."

"Leave her a note," Tino said. "Tape it to the door."

"Where do you want to eat?" Tino said.

"I don't exactly know," J.D. said. "Why don't we just drive around a while until I think of something."

They went down the stairs and out into the warm night air. Tino led the way to his orange Vega. They got in and drove away.

Once out on the street, J.D. decided he wanted just a hamburger. "Let's go to MacDonald's again."

Tino drove to the MacDonald's. J.D. climbed out of the car lifelessly and went inside. He ordered his food to go. When it came they went back to the car.

"I have to start watching my money," J.D. said as they got in. "I don't have much left. Now that I'm on my own, I have to be careful with every penny."

"Do you want to stay here or drive around as you eat?" Tino asked.

"Drive around," J.D. said. "Go out by the creek."

Tino started the engine happily. He shot out of the parking lot and down the road and out into the country.

"I feel free on these country roads," Tino said. "No one around to bother you; no one for miles."

The car hummed down the road at high speed. J.D. ate his hamburger quietly.
"I feel cooped up back there in the dormitory," Tino said. "The way James has the brown paper bags hung all over the place, it feels like the ceiling's coming down about to crush me, I don't know how he can stand it."

"He's crazy," J.D. said, looking out the window.

"Crazy. Yes, he's crazy."

The black countryside wound by them on either side. J.D. stared out the window.

"You know what we ought to do?" Tino said. "We ought to go camping out here some night."

"It wouldn't be the same," J.D. sighed.

"Wouldn't be the same as what?"

"Nothing."

Tino took the left off the paved road onto the dirt road.

The car raced ahead of a trail of dust.

"It's a nice night," Tino said.

"I've seen better," J.D. said.

The car leaned through the turn to the right.

"It's warm, no wind, not a cloud in the sky. Look at all those stars."

J.D. looked down at the ground silently. The car swerved and took the curve back to the left. The bridge was right up ahead.

"And right by the creek would be a great place to camp," Tino emphasized.

J.D. wasn't listening. The old railroad bridge appeared in the headlight. Tino slowed the car and crossed the bridge.
J.D. sat up suddenly and stared out the front window. Off to the right where they usually parked was a yellow Maverick. It was Julia's car.

"Drive on by! Drive on by!" J.D. cried. Tino pushed the accelerator down and the car shot away. They went up the road and around a curve.

"Now turn around and go back by! Go back by!"

"Listen," Tino said. "I don't think it's such a great idea."

"Turn around. I'm all right. I'm all right."

Tino reluctantly turned the car around and headed it back the other way. They came around the turn in the road. The headlights of the car fell squarely on the yellow Maverick. J.D. stared at the car. Then there was a movement inside the car. A face appeared in the window. The beams of the headlights were reflected in miniature by a pair of black-framed glasses.

"James," J.D. said under his breath. "It's James."

J.D. collapsed back into the seat. Tino drove the car across the bridge and back up the dirt road.

"I tried to tell you before," Tino said. "She came by and picked him up a couple of hours ago. I didn't know they would be here. I swear I didn't know. This was an accident. I swear."

J.D. stopped listening. He put his hands across his chest and sat very still.
J.D. sat in the dark in his room. He stared out the window intently, watching. The yellow Maverick drove into the parking lot. He leaned out the window and watched. James got out. The Maverick sped away. James watched it go, then climbed in the window to his room. J.D. waited a few minutes, then went to the door. He paused for a moment. He reached for the knob and turned.

Once in the hall he felt like turning around and returning to his room, locking himself inside. He walked slowly and lifelessly down the stairs. Once in the hallway below, he paused again. He walked slowly down the hall and stopped in front of Tino and James's room.

He knocked softly. There was no reply. He opened the door quietly and stepped inside and shut it softly behind him. The room was dark. There was a faint odor. A small amount of light found its way in through the open window. A small breeze began to blow, ruffling the curtains. The light from outside suddenly reflected off two small pieces of glass on the top bunk of the bed.

"James," J.D. said.

There was a slight movement on the bed. James then sat up and swung his feet over the side and faced him.

"James," J.D. said. "I saw you. Just now out by the bridge. Tino and I were the ones who came by then turned around and came back."

James said nothing.
"I know it was you," J.D. said. "I saw you when you sat up."

James sat quite still.

"It's not that I blame you," J.D. said. "I know it's not your fault. I know that she took you there."

James remained silent.

"But why did she do it?" J.D. said. "I gave her everything she asked for. She said she didn't want to be alone. I stayed with her all the time. I did everything she wanted me to do."

"I don't understand her either," a voice said hoarsely from the bunk.

J.D. turned in the darkness and faced the bunk.

"What did you say?" he asked incredulously.

"I said I don't understand her either," James said.

"Why did you go with her?" J.D. said. "You know how I felt about her."

"I don't know," James said. "I don't know why I do anything."

"But you knew she was mine."

"I don't know," James said. "Life is not made to understand. I don't understand it."

"I don't understand it either."

J.D. sat down in a chair near the window and held his head in his hands.

"We have to make a choice," James said. "We choose to understand but we do not attain understanding. It is not an available choice."
"If we can't choose then there is no choice," J.D. said quietly.

"Yes," James said. "There is indeed a choice."

"What is it?" J.D. said lifelessly. "Should I call her up and beg her to come back?"

"No."

"Should I tell her that you aren't going to see her anymore?"

"No."

"I don't know what to do. If you don't see her, she'll find someone else. There are lots of young guys out there. She's not afraid to try anything."

"No," James said emphatically.

"What do you think I should do?"

"Choose," James said. "Make a choice. Choose being or not being."

"Being what?" J.D. said in awe. "Being with her? Being without her? I still don't have a choice. I can never be with her."

"Being en soi. Being pour soi. Being in itself or being for itself."

"I don't understand you," J.D. said. "I don't understand you or life."

"The choice is simple," James said. "You may either continue your consciousness or you may fuse with the universe and give it up."
"Are you talking about dying?" J.D. said in revelation. "Are you talking about suicide?"

"It is the choice we must make," James said. "We must decide for ourselves."

J.D. sat silently. He looked out the window into the night. The lights of streetlamps made the outside strangely appealing compared to the darkness of the room.

"I have chosen," James said. "I will allow you to choose for yourself." There was a movement on the bed. A rasping sound turned to substance as the flame of a match lit up James's face. James sat on the bed, holding the match.

"What are you doing?" J.D. asked in amazement. J.D. sat bolt upright in his chair and stared at the wavering flame. The appeal of the light of the flame outshone the lamps outside. J.D. stared at the flame. It wavered before his eyes. He stared at the flame.

James lifted the match above his head. It touched the brown paper bags hanging in the net suspended from the ceiling and grew larger. J.D. stared at the flame. It leapt and grew. It reached up and licked at the ceiling. It reached out and caressed the walls. The brightness of the flame was blinding as the bags caught fire and lit up the whole room. The netting began to collapse. J.D. could see James's face surrounded by a ring of fire.

"Make your choice," James said. "I have made mine."
J.D. sprang to his feet and lunged out the window head first. He felt himself falling through space. He was lost, without the aid of time and space.

His body crashed heavily into the hood of a car parked outside the window. He went limp and rolled off onto the ground. He lay there breathing rapidly with his eyes shut tightly. He did not want to see anything. He did not want to see.

Someone grasped him firmly by the arms and someone else by the legs. They picked him up quickly and carried him away. The air felt much cooler where they set him down. He could hear people shouting. He couldn't make out what they were saying. He rolled over onto his back and opened his eyes.

The sky was clear. He could see several stars behind the light of the street lamps and through the bright yellow light radiating from somewhere to his right. He sat up and saw that a large crowd of people stood between him and the yellow light. Tino and New York knelt over him. They were saying something to him. It was his own name, yet it sounded strange.

"J.D.! What happened? What were you doing in there?"

"Non being," J.D. said finally.

J.D. stood in the early morning light and looked at the blackened ring around the window to Tino and James's room. The fire trucks were gone. The smell remained.
The sky was slightly overcast. Tino had spent the night in J.D.'s spare bed. J.D. had not slept. He sat up all night and stared out the window, not seeing anything. He had no desire to leave the room until light began to fill the sky in morning.

The room inside the blackened window was empty, as charred as the window frame. Everything was lost—all of Tino's things, all of James's things; James himself was taken away in a slow moving and silent ambulance sometime during the night.

J.D. rubbed his sleepless eyes and sighed with exhaustion. There was no longer anything for him to do here. He had made his decision, and now he had to live with it. He turned his back on the window and walked away.