

Hungry Generations

—a novel

Daniel C. Melnick

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!

No hungry generations tread thee down.

—Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale”

If you have played a Beethoven sonata, then you know what the problems are of looking at a score and how it is to be turned into sound...Listening to a record, we neither feel the physical difficulty of realizing a musical text, nor can we witness, as in a concert hall, the exciting spectacle of the torments of the performer.

—Charles Rosen, “The Future of Music”

Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? He felt as if the way were opening before him for the unknown nourishment he craved.

—Kafka, “The Metamorphosis”

Author's Note:

Though historical figures appear in the following pages (Beethoven, Bartok, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, the Manns, the Werfels, Jack Warner, Jerry Fielding, etc.), they are imaginary—not historical—depictions and are not intended to render any actual events or to alter the fictional nature of this novel. On the contrary, as characters in the novel, they are mere figments of the author's imagination.

These imaginings emerge from many years of listening and reading, and the novel has benefited from the thoughtful responses of several people, including the late Matt Hazelrig, Mark Arax, Bill Goodman, David Melnick, and above all my wife, Jeanette Arax Melnick. Of course, the author is responsible for all the failures of perception herein, both intended and unintended, and the untoward distortions. For example, at one point, the reader will hear Beethoven speak unwittingly in the voice of Shakespeare's Dogberry: "Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this."

We can only hope.

In memory of my parents

I: Allegro: Autumn 1972

II: Scherzo—Assai vivace: December 1972

III: Adagio sostenuto—Appassionato e con molto sentimento:
Winter 1973

IV: Largo—Allegro risoluto:
The Ides of March—Spring, Summer, and Fall 1973

I

Allegro:
Autumn 1972

Jack sat in the middle of the cavernous hall. All around him men in suits were seated beside women in gowns and furs. Occasionally there were young people, students who must have had passes or generous parents or enough desire to scrape up the cash to hear Alexander Petrov, the reclusive virtuoso pianist, at this October first concert. Jack had arrived in L.A. a few weeks ago, a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music in search of a studio job as well as time to compose. He remembered his parents' stories about the pianist, who was a distant relative of Jack's father. When he read about the concert, he wanted to hear the great musician, and he decided to go. Petrov was one of that select group of performers who had the power to stir even a resistant listener. On records and, it was said, especially live, the heavy old pianist seemed almost a godlike force—a Neptune bringing shape and order to the ocean of energy pouring through the music he played, as if all that wild risk and passionate surge were containable in a bowl of gold or a brimming goblet of glass. Petrov would be playing Beethoven's Hammerklavier after intermission; the pianist had made a classic recording of the sonata in the fifties. Now, twenty years later, he played in concert only once a year—in October at UCLA.

Janice occupied the seat next to Jack. Her long purplish hair circled her face so that she kept smoothing it from her cheek, and the strap of her black velvet dress kept falling from her brown shoulder. He had met her three weeks ago, on the day he looked for a Venice apartment, walking up and down the grid of pedestrian paths which sufficed for streets in the beach-front neighborhood between Rose and Venice. Several times, he had trekked past the Ellison Hotel when Janice leaned out the window of her first floor apartment and pointed across the Paloma walkway to the dilapidated stucco bungalow, a shack of a house on the corner.

"They're about to move out," she had said; her hair, dyed purple over brown, had hung below her shoulders, her black bikini loosely circling her. She was completely tanned, and her face had the weathered cast of a woman who had given months and years to the sun. She looked to be forty, about a decade older than Jack. She had asked his name, and she gave him the name of the landlord. When he moved in, Janice had been fascinated by the music pouring from his windows. She couldn't understand his obsession but she had wanted to attend when she heard he was going to this Sunday concert.

Now, as the hall lights dimmed, three people appeared at a doorway near the stage. A short, graying woman with a black fur folded over her arm must be Petrov's wife, Jack thought, and the blonde woman and the man were his children. The younger woman headed them toward three vacant aisle seats close to the stage. The man had unruly black hair; he would be Joseph, a pianist like his father, only just beginning his career. Suddenly there was a roar of applause, and Alexander Petrov emerged onto the stage. His neutral walk had the art the occasion demanded, with all the hungry souls clapping at him, many of them, it seemed, celebrating the fabric of their gowns and suits.

Petrov was big and stout, with a horseshoe of trim white hair rimming his shiny head. His face—familiar from record jackets—gazed blankly out at the only audience he allowed now in this yearly concert at UCLA. Suddenly he stepped forward to the verge of the stage and raised his hands to silence the crowd: "This concert," he said in an accented voice, "I want to dedicate it to the memory of my friend and great pianist who passed away this last month. Robert Casadesus."

He sat down and immediately struck his large and graceful hands on the piano keyboard: Bartok's *Allegro Barbaro*, designed to draw in without appeasing the audience. His clanging, plangent tone was astonishing, each note incredibly clear and full. The improvisatory liberties he took seemed always on the verge of exploding the work, yet every manic detail was balanced, in place. Then Stravinsky's *Three Scenes from Petroushka*: the heavy man became a circus master playing presto and with complete detachment the technically impossible work, as if it were a demonic joke, a throw of the dice. Finally, Schoenberg's *Three Pieces opus 11*. He played so quietly and with such clarity that Jack felt the auditorium recede, recede, and all the city leveled to its original silence; then Petrov would visit this silent world with moments of such dissonant shouts of tone immediately subdued that Jack smiled tensely to keep from crying out. Yet all the while he waited, his soul tightening. He kept recalling the sound of Petrov's historic recording and the score of the sonata which the pianist was to play after intermission.

The paneled foyer of Royce Hall was packed with people during the break. They stood by columns, under arches, crowding out into the evening air. Janice stood with him on the plaza under the clouded sky.

There was an odd static in the air, and the rim of nearby Bel Air hills seemed edged by a fluorescent charge. He remembered first seeing the Santa Monica mountains when he flew in

from Cleveland three weeks ago; the plane descended over this squat ridge of mountains, floating and dipping over the etched and inhabited canyons and then skimming toward the great gray mass of Pacific water. On stereo earphones, he had listened to Beethoven's Eroica. "Welcome to Los..." the stewardess had cut in, and the music's homage to freedom vanished into silence. Inside LAX, Jack had bought the Los Angeles Times for September 6, 1972: Black September Attacks Israelis at Munich Olympics. Eleven Dead. It was not a summer of love. Another toll, an uncounted one, had begun with the bombing of North Vietnam, and just three months ago, twenty-five died in a bombing at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv. He had visited Israel as a boy, after his bar-mitzvah: the thin pine trees, the peeling eucalyptuses, the dark hallucinatory cypresses, the oleanders with waxen leaves and pink flowers, the billowing bougainvillea with veils of massed deep purple flowers and little trails of them amid the upreaching limbs of cactuses on apartment balconies in Tel Aviv. The arid beauty and expansiveness reminded him of L.A., yet this memory—like his sense of being Jewish—was dream-like, fragmentary, and remote.

"Hey," Janice said on the plaza now, "are you okay?"

"Sure. How'd you like the music?"

"Strange. Especially the last piece. Strange music," she said.

"You wanted to come."

"Why do you smile? You're laughing at me."

"What about the music I hear you playing?" He was wearing his jeans and blue sweater with a brown tweed coat, and he began to shuffle out a rhythm on the gravel, to dance. She tightened her psychedelic shawl around her black dress. Amid the blare of the crowd he began chanting a travesty of an Iggy Pop travesty—"It's nineteen seventy-two, okay"—and she laughed. She reached toward him and held him against her laughing body, her arms tight around his back to stop him. The Hall lights were blinking and the crowd returning now. At the open doors stood the young man with unruly dark hair, finishing a cigarette. He had Petrov's face and nose, yet there was an odd blankness to his eyes, not like his father's, not German Jewish or Russian. He looked at Jack, as if he recognized someone, and then calmly turned away.

The lights dimmed again, and the seventy year old pianist—his head shining—sat before the keys. Rapidly and at once, he relished Beethoven's opening leaps and the athletic intensity of the Hammerklavier. In the fugato development, chords slammed one after another over the

keyboard, and dissonance held the air. Then the sonata's opening leaps returned at the unleashed pace Beethoven prescribed, and the Allegro raced to its end. Jack watched the sweating old man pause and begin to draw the stumbling Scherzo out, its assai vivace rhythm resistant and off beat.

Then the pianist hunched in the glare and silence before the Adagio. He raised his thick hands, and the slow music began to escape from the piano and spread out—*appassionato e con molto sentimento*—into the evening stillness where the audience sat poised. In the middle of the Adagio, Jack leaned back, his eyes shut, to hear Beethoven's variation, four notes for each pulse, twelve in each bar hovering, luminous and quiet. Finally the rhythm fragmented again and admitted to stretches of silence; the pathology of the sonata was carefully exposed, the long-breathed serenity of its yet living lungs, the still slowly pulsing heart. Then, the Adagio sostenuto ended.

Tentative tones arose: weak, curtailed breaths, an irregular pulse, and then the old man's hands acquired new sporadic life, improvisatory and unpredictable. Here notes disregarded the priorities of symmetry, free now to draw new breath. Here the sonata rose up, ghostly and vital by turns, and the spontaneous exhalations grew. Here, at the point of death, fierce spirits were stirred and unleashed, and suddenly the final fugue flew from its Largo introduction.

Now Petrov's temperament found free expression, a willingness to take the greatest risks. At moments, he played the Allegro risoluto with a ruthlessness, which seemed to stamp and hurdle with steeled cruelty. Dissonances and sforzandi, trills and leaps, were all absorbed into the shock and momentum of the unfolding fugue. Suddenly there was the boom and crackle of a disintegratingly violent climax, and Petrov grabbed the body of the piano. When his hands let go there was absolute silence, and in this silence he began the canon, barely audible, with a gentleness which was intolerable in its control of touch, and Jack had to keep himself from laughing aloud or crying out. Finally, the rigorous counterpoint returned, and wave after wave of music renewed itself in the face of the sonata's death.

At the final chord, there was a standing ovation. After the fourth, Petrov lifted his hands toward the audience like a surgeon wriggling his fingers at a patient, shaking them at the crowd and the Steinway behind him. He grinned and walked off, not to return.

Dazed, Jack made his way to the aisle with Janice. He felt compelled to go to Petrov's reception, and he walked with her against the flow of the exiting crowd. With a group of other fans or friends, they walked up onto the stage, past Petrov's black grand, and found their way to

the room where the pianist held court, a lit cigar in hand. Sweat still poured from his face as he shook the hands of people who filed past him, received the embraces of furred ladies; warm and voluble, he passed some of these people on to his wife and daughter, who stood near him. Jack had been right. Mrs. Petrov was this small, gray woman who met those who came to her politely, with a detached, perceptive gaze.

The daughter stood next to her. She wore a suede suit, and her blonde hair was pulled tight around her head, though there were some untamed wisps at her slender neck. Her glance had a clarity and intensity suggesting a life apart from the social ritual in which she was engaged. Her eyes were dark brown, almost black, quite unlike those of the mother, pale and gray, or of the brother, who was nowhere to be seen. Petrov's daughter looked to be Jack's age.

He stood before Petrov and shook his hand. "Thank you for a wonderful concert," Jack said softly. "I'm Julius Weinstein's son."

"What?" the pianist boomed. "I remember Julius! The cellist. With the Cleveland Orchestra now. My second cousin. I'm delighted to see you! Meet my wife Helen. And your name?" He told them. Petrov asked to whom he should sign his autograph when Janice thrust her program toward the pianist, who carefully assessed her. "I like your shawl," he said. Mrs. Petrov told Jack he must call and visit. Their daughter Sarah stood before him.

"Good to meet you," she said. Jack was astonished by the beautiful resonance of her high voice as she spoke her greeting. She shook hands firmly with her thin hand.

* * *

"You smile when you're listening at the concert, you know?" Janice said as they drove in his sixty-two VW through the night fog toward Santa Monica.

"I smile? Probably from pleasure," he said.

He felt outside the present. He glanced at her face, thin and weathered brown, the fine long nose, the high bones of her cheeks, the purplish hair. She began to tell him about herself—her mad Italian family, her past relationship to a folk singer in the sixties, and in the fifties the years she spent in San Francisco, the beat scene in North Beach, the protests against HUAC. Now she worked at a café on Rose, baking bread and pastries in the back kitchen. She survived, with afternoons off for the beach.

When she asked him in, Jack took automatic steps up the Ellison's front stairs and into her first-floor apartment. She handed him a glass of bourbon with ice and sat next to him on the

couch. “Do you want something else—there’s some hash around somewhere.” He lifted his glass and drank—it was enough. The Hammerklavier still pulsed through him as they talked; in a while he would walk across the cement path of Paloma and work to compose some as yet unheard and unimagined music. She lowered the straps of her velvet dress; she smiled and said, “Welcome to Los Angeles.” Later their bodies, joined and naked on the couch, moved together in an intricate, leaping rhythm.

* * *

Beyond the beach a block away, the Pacific was clearly visible from Jack’s bungalow on the corner of the Paloma path. The windows of the living room were open to the ocean shimmering in the October sun, and hot Santa Ana air pulsed through the room. He wore only cut off jeans, sitting at his table by the open windows and looking through the swaying lace curtains. His back was sunburned, and his reddened legs were tender against the armless wooden chair. In the room there were second-hand chairs, a stuffed couch, a rented upright piano, and shelves with books, records, and a stereo. The volume was turned up, and Beethoven’s music absorbed Jack. On the table were his journals—wire-bound, cardboard-backed volumes of music paper—in which he composed and occasionally wrote notes to himself.

The final fugue ended, and Beethoven’s leaping cadence left him in silence. The phonograph stopped. He rose from his chair and walked barefoot to the kitchen to pour a cup of coffee from the pot he heated on the stove. He cut a slice of raisin-pumpernickel and began chewing the heavy peasant bread, savoring the seeded wheat, smelling its sweetness.

In the living room, he turned over the record, and pushed the lever to turn on the machine. The player’s needle edged into the circumference of the vinyl, and again the Hammerklavier sonata leapt from the speakers—it was Petrov’s great recording of the sonata. In the three days since hearing the pianist play, Jack had been drawn back to his writing desk and to this recording, to the glimpsed idea of a new composition.

He reached to the pile of journals for an old one, which he placed over the current 1972 notebook before him on the table. The earlier volume contained musical sketches and diary entries from 1970, the year he received his Masters at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Jack turned to the last pages where he had begun work on a sonata for piano. He was ready now to return to these beginnings. He could imagine the entire promised structure, and he transposed from the old notebook to his latest one the initial ideas for the sonata’s first movement.

As he closed the 1970 journal, he noticed the final diary entry: “Dec 31: I’ve written down my first musical ideas since getting my MA in May. Spurred by listening to the immense and wonderful Hammerklavier sonata (Petrov’s great recording, the wizard). Not an homage to Beethoven: it will be a confrontation. Not with shadows, but presences, for I continually feel his presence.” And then a postscript: “Molly and I have broken up. The long and winding road is permanently closing. She always claimed I didn’t respect her going to law school. But I did respect *her* and the intensity of our love, the lovely intensity of our love-making? I don’t know now, sitting here at midnight, staring out the window at snow falling, eddying in the light as if under water, like an ocean current.”

His professor’s office had overlooked a snow-clogged street, which bordered the squat, green, glassed-in building of the Music Institute in Cleveland. It was 1966 when Marcel Dick had first invited Jack into the stuffy office strewn with papers. Dick had a thick face, and a narrow upper lip knifed across it; glasses masked the refinement and intensity of his eyes. He had been the first violist at Vienna, Detroit, Cleveland, had studied with Schoenberg and helped found the Kolisch Quartet at Schoenberg’s suggestion, and finally had headed theory and composition at the Institute. He addressed Jack, a new Masters student and son of his cellist friend from the Cleveland Orchestra, as Mr. Weinstein: “This much I can do for you,” Marcel Dick said, “because you already have something yourself, Mr. Weinstein. You already know that the theme comes first. But then what do you do with it! In Vienna, Schoenberg looked at the first piece I showed him. ‘Dick,’ he said, ‘you must pare this down. Prune and cultivate: you’ll see what wonders that will do.’ Why did he say that? Because a piece of music must be a unit, an organic whole. This was Arnold’s view, and it is mine. Today the language we speak is dissonance. But that doesn’t mean imagination and craftsmanship are no longer in cahoots!” So Jack had begun his four years at the Institute, from 1966 until two years ago. With Dick, Victor Babin, and Donald Erb. Earlier this year, when he decided to move to L.A., Erb had agreed to call an old friend, a studio composer, for Jack.

On the stereo now, Jack heard Beethoven’s resounding leaps—Petrov’s protean fists in flight above the piano keyboard—as they built toward the climax of the Allegro’s development. He inked a corresponding leap over the bass clef at the opening of his new work. The Hammerklavier would speak out, an oblique resurrection, from Jack’s sonata.

Three bald geniuses entered in a gust of laughter. Ashen and aflame in the October sun, Schoenberg, Bartok, and Stravinsky cast moving shadows over the living room. They sat on the overstuffed chairs and couch, and asked Jack for brandy to pour in three cups of coffee. They spoke all at once. He heard the Viennese Jew, solid and tanned, say, "I discovered the space between. The chasms in cliché." The pale, fragile Hungarian said: "Into all abysses, I bear the blessing of my saying yes." And the thin Russian shouted: "We belong nowhere now, so recently dead, possessing sixteen languages between us and we've not come this far to hear you grasp at nothing."

The opening notes of Jack's sonata lay before him in the early autumn sun, and he held the table's edge as Beethoven's final leaping cadence left the room in silence.

In the middle of October, he twice visited the deeply indented canyons in the low mountains above Hollywood and Beverly Hills. One visit was to the home of a composer who worked for United Artists. Jack had consulted a list of studio arranger/composers he had written in his notebook. Bachrach, Baker, Berry, Burns, Cameron, Cordell, Delerue, Fielding, Gold, Goldsmith, Hamlich, Jones, Kandor, Kostal, Lai, Legrand, Mancini, Newman, Previn, Rosenthal, Scharf, Tiomkin, Williams—some with names of assistants and phone numbers. He had called one last week, the man his teacher knew, and he was invited to the house on a sloping hillside just north of Hollywood.

Brian walked with him around the yard, a ragged lawn with irrigated camellia and rose bushes. Both men held beers. “Maybe you can help *me*,” he said in a British accent, punctuated by American idioms. “At least *you’ll* get a job, working with Jerry and me, learning what the industry is about, the bullshit and general insanity of it. Peckinpah is going to start a brand new film, and he has Bob Dylan in it. He wants Bob to *score* it. What a half-assed idea. The son-of-a-bitch knows how to score like he knows how to conduct an orchestra. But Sam wants it. And my job is to help out—i.e., keep him from fucking up. Maybe you can help me *communicate*.” So, as October wore on, Jack began to make a daily trek to the music studio where he learned the necessary skills of the trade from Brian.

Then, on Sunday afternoon at the end of his first week at the studio, Jack again drove into the low mountains intersecting L.A. His green VW rattled up Benedict Canyon Drive, past a welter of close-packed mansions and ramshackle bungalows, their garages facing directly onto the circling street. Far up the Canyon, he discovered the Petrovs’ address, the driveway indenting a mass of brush. It was wedged between two new luxurious walled-in homes. He walked up the hill, trampling on weeds, which covered the stone path, passing overgrown bushes and a yellowing garden gone to seed. At the top, a circle of trees—evergreen, a lacy pepper tree, a palm, and eucalyptus—towered over the old stucco house, its roof crowned with red-tiles, and the garage to one side on the edge of the hillcrest. That morning Sarah Petrov had answered the phone, and he heard the beautiful intensity of her soprano voice. She confirmed his meeting with

her parents Sunday afternoon. He asked if she would be home—he would like to see her. She had said she wouldn't be there. It wasn't possible.

Now Petrov slowly paced over the oriental rugs and polished oak floor of his music room. He wore a pocketed linen shirt, pale plaid, and he gestured for Jack to take a seat on an armchair near the piano. Then he stopped before a cabinet of liquor and wines.

"I wish Helen could join us; she gives her regrets, of course," he said, a smile on his thick face.

"Is Mrs. Petrov ill?"

"Is Mrs. Petrov ill? She's a bit frail these days. Upstairs, not feeling well—maybe she'll join us later." He held up a blood-red bottle from the cabinet. "How would you like some Fūking?" His jovial face stretched wider. "Good for the music. Or Scotch, wine, anything?"

Jack took what Petrov was having, Scotch, and asked for plenty of water. The pianist sat down on a stuffed couch. There were indentations in the plush where people had sat over the years. His back was to the sliding glass door and the gray sky beyond it.

"Now, why didn't you bring your ladyfriend, with the purple hair? What is her name?"

"Janice. A good person, but I..."

"I can see you're an extravagant young man. A genuine radical when it comes to women!" Petrov's laughter exploded in the room. "I received a letter last week from Julius Weinstein, my cousin. Rather, my second, or third cousin. We knew him and your mother Rosa when they lived here in the forties—before they moved to Cleveland. They were struggling, you know, and we tried to help. Also, I remember your grandmother in Berlin. She was a relative on my mother's side. A very pretty woman. When I was a little boy, she would lift me up in the air: 'Sashela, Sashela.' Very sweet. So now I know something about you from Julius."

Jack knew his father had written, at his mother's prodding. "Sasha should know what's become of you," Rosa had said on the phone, with her warmth and worry: her guards against all ill winds and ill will. "Maybe he can help you."

Suddenly Jack felt a sensation from childhood, as if he levitated up to the ceiling and looked down now at the music room. He remembered, when he was seven or eight, from just that height on the stairs, he used to watch his father play the cello. He would listen in pajamas, leaning his face against the banister bars, sitting there invisible to the adults below who played quartets—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms. Always, his father seemed tentative, a

satellite orbiting among the stars who visited Cleveland and sometimes filled the Weinstein living room with their force and brilliance—Menuhin, Stern, once even Heifetz. And Jack as a child felt like a satellite's satellite.

"I can imagine what he's written to you," Jack said to Petrov now, and lifted his glass in the air. "Don't believe a word of it."

"You're a man of many talents. A pianist, you studied with Babin. And you're a composer. I have composed too, did you know? Also I've known many composers. Their memories are dear to my heart. Gone now: my friends, almost all my friends are dead."

"You knew Stravinsky and Schoenberg."

"They would come here," he said, pointing at his own chair. "To this room."

"That's amazing." It was as if Petrov had casually identified Jack's innermost imagining as he composed, as he dreamed his deepest dreams.

"Oh yes. Every year we gave big parties. Once, I invited both Igor and Arnold! That was before my *first* concert at UCLA, in 1942. What a party we gave! And quite a little audience to play for: Schoenberg, the Stravinskys, the Manns, the Werfels—you know Alma, Mahler's widow—and Adorno...I remember even your parents were there, Rosa and Julius! My Helen cooked and baked for days. People loved the meses, the appetizers, the pastries. Not to mention the drinks that flowed, the Vodka and Scotch, the Claret and Sherry. I remember I went to the piano over there." Petrov pointed to the concert Steinway across the room from them, and Jack imagined him walking across the room, undaunted by the clink of their glasses and the gnaw of their eating. The pianist must have smiled before his guests for the full worth of his years (forty, then), height (at least six feet), and talent (immeasurable).

"I told them: 'Next Sunday is my first benefit concert at UCLA, at Royce Hall! You are so kind to listen: my undress rehearsal.'" He laughed as did Jack, as his guests must have then. "'Arnold, in your honor, I play the Suite opus 25, and Igor, in yours, the Sonata. After intermission, the Hammerklavier!'" Petrov looked away from Jack, his glance ranging across the room, beyond the glass door of the music room to the hill, the city, the ocean, the earth's ken.

"Do you know Schoenberg's Suite?" he asked in a detached voice now, and Jack nodded. Suddenly Petrov sprang from his seat. "I will play it for you!" he said. His old frame—heavy and lanky—swam across the room, as if time and space had become fluid and distorted, and then the pianist sat at his instrument like a general at his map. The uncanny momentum of Schoenberg's

opus 25 gripped the sole, startled listener—its riveting ostinato repetitions, the angular leaps and askew couplings of high and low, the slammed chords and sinuous melodies giving way all of a sudden to silence.

The second movement began, its dancing rhythm sometimes leaping and eruptive, the Gavotte's row of twelve tones continually punctuated with moments of no sound like empty spaces inside the series of tones. In the middle of the movement, a macabre Musette waddled out, a parody of dance, lumbering and ironic like Petrov himself now, his big hands and arms busy building the brilliant structure. The Gavotte returned, beautiful and stricken, with its vanishing ghosts of feeling.

As Jack knew it would, then, the genuine ghost town of broken melody arose before him, its fragments of melody strewn across the keyboard. Here, in the Intermezzo, was an infinite scattering, where one breathed the air of another planet. Jack saw Petrov's face beginning strangely, palely to glow in the afternoon sun. At the drop of a hat, the pianist conjured this ashen landscape and summoned up evanescent voices, echoing across the crystalline infinity of the decrepit music room. Little, asphyxiated sighs intensified sometimes into hammered fortissimo chords, which rang out and then fell back, deteriorating toward the final silence.

Now Petrov's hands were all fire and air, energy and movement: this Menuette was no tragic travesty, but a mockery of dance, decorated by vicious filigrees of rapid notes. The pianist's finger work was fleet and dry, conscious of the barbarities it wrought. "Unbelievable," Jack kept repeating to himself, and his mantra did not cease as he heard the finale pour forth, the Gigue's ceaseless waves of power. Abrupt shifts from energy to stasis kept recurring, so that what was loud or soft, violent or tender, civilized or barbaric became indistinguishable from one another. Petrov tossed the final chords toward the younger man, and they clanged out to disappear into the frayed oriental carpet at his feet.

"Unbelievable," Jack said, clapping vigorously and alone.

Petrov was somber, and his eyes were practically shut. In his pocket he found a cigar and matches, and now he lit the stogie as he sat back on the couch opposite Jack. He reached another cigar toward his visitor.

"Thanks, but no."

"We were so young then!" Petrov said. "1942. Naturally, we were all struggling to survive."

“My god, I can understand. Of course, certain things haven’t changed too much, Mr. Petrov. As far as survival in LA is concerned.”

Petrov’s glance absorbed Jack for a long moment, and the pianist said, “Please, call me Sasha.”

“Sasha,” Jack said gently, “I mean the struggle to earn a living. I’ve begun to compose here, but I have to survive. In Los Angeles, no less! Do you know the Woody Guthrie song?” With an ironic grin, Jack sang the chorus of the “Do Re Me” song, and Petrov smiled at the roughly rendered folk lament.

“You understand,” Jack continued. “California’s no paradise if there’s not enough.... Anyway, you may not believe it—I can’t quite—but I’ve started to work in the Studios, god help me, at United Artists.”

The pianist let out a loud laugh and sigh at once, a boom of delight and sorrow.

“You remind me of someone I knew thirty years ago,” he said. “Yes! You remind me of Bruno Fried. A fine, sensitive man, like you. He would look around with his wide eyes, registering everything. He also worked at UA. Bruno used to sit just there, where you sit. Listening to my complaints. He knew what I was going through. Partly because he too was an exile. Uprooted just as I was, and hungry like me, but for what! I knew him slightly in Berlin, in the cafés, but it wasn’t until I fled to this paradise, as you say, this paradise of no culture, that we became real friends. You even look like him. What a delight! You’re taller, better looking. But your eyes, wide and sensitive—I must say, just like Bruno Fried’s.”

“Bruno Fried?” Jack repeated. He felt the force of the old man’s words, almost his categorization, and also the warmth and need welling in the pianist’s voice.

“Yes, a good friend,” Petrov said. “In the early forties, he took a few composing lessons from Schoenberg. Because he had ambitions! Like Adorno—Teddy had studied with Berg. And when those two would meet at our parties, in 1942 and then...how they’d spark each other! Once when I proposed a toast: ‘To all of you gathered here in my canyon home. Just like in Berlin. Who would have thought? Each of us a refugee, and here we are in sunny Los Angeles.’” Petrov raised his glass of Scotch now, as if it were still 1942 and he were still surrounded by emigrant musicians. “‘Berlin or Los Angeles,’ Bruno piped up, his brown eyes roaming around the room, his tongue always sticking out a bit from his mouth: ‘Either way we’re ruined. They’re two

coordinates in hell.’ And Teddy said, ‘True!’ raising his glass of Claret: ‘To the harrowing of hell!’”

Jack was moved by the pianist’s outpouring, his overflowing words, and he felt a responsive warmth, a spontaneous empathy for the man forty years his senior.

“Mr. Petrov, I’d like to study with you.” Jack had not wanted to say these words. He felt his face flush. Yet once spoken, they seemed inevitable.

“You must call me Sasha.” Again Petrov’s glance searched the young composer’s face. “Let’s get to know one another a little more, no?” Petrov sipped from his glass of neat Scotch. “Busoni was *my* teacher. What a demon he was as a pianist, what clarity as a teacher. An Italian. I am half Russian: the real thing,” he grinned. “Though my father had nothing to do with my success. The ass opposed me at every step: I mean, even when I was five, he used to scoff at my mother as she taught me the piano. My dear mother. She was from a refined Jewish family in Berlin, your father’s relatives. And she married this displaced Russian caviar merchant. For passion, I believe. For passion. When I began to have a career and everyone attended my concerts—everyone, Busoni himself, Alfred Einstein, Busch and Serkin, Schnabel, Eisler, Weill—my father began to boast: *he* was responsible for my success, my genius. He was a pathetic, ignorant son-of-a-bitch.”

Jack was slightly drunk. As the voluble, intense old man gestured before him, blowing smoke from his cigar, he felt his own ego oddly evanescent, disappearing before Petrov’s flow and glance. For a moment, the old man’s intensity seemed to suspend, to erase Jack’s identity and existence. Then the odd sensation passed, and words came to him. “My Dad said you met your wife in Berlin, but she’s...”

“Helen is Greek. She used to open our house to people every Sunday. In the late twenties, the early thirties. What she fed them, baked for them! People loved her, and not only for her baklava. Everyone came. Or we met them at the Romanisches Café. And then again here, the same thing, after we arrived in 1939. We knew everyone. Even Brecht, sometimes we would see! Bristling, shrill, such a powerful temperament. LA is Hell! he would say. Bert arrived in New York in 1941 on the same boat with Chagall and Levi-Strauss, but he could never get over the feeling of illusion here, the emptiness. How disoriented he was, and bitter! Not that I was immune to that disease. You can’t imagine what we went through. But I remember what it was

like in Berlin a decade before—and earlier! How different it was, in 1928, when Brecht and Weill collaborated on *Die Dreigroschenoper* in Berlin...”

Jack began intoning the *Ballad of Mack the Knife*, and immediately Petrov joined in, broadly bellowing, lifting his bulk off the tattered sofa to refill the glasses of Scotch. Their German and English jarred and intermingled. The shark Macheath swam into the room, hiding his Messer, flashing his teeth.

Jack asked for a glass of water.

“You can’t imagine,” Petrov said, settling down once more on the couch, “Bert was a communist for sure, and Kurt was the son of a cantor, who just happened to have married a woman blazingly hot, incredible! And together, they made the music of our time and place: the wasteland! The triviality of it was so extraordinary. It said: you live in a trivial world, and the only thing of worth is the crazy intensity of your desperation. Only the torture you feel is valuable, all the rest is dross. So what’s the answer? Embrace it! Go ahead: rub your nose in it, in the muck. The snide singers, the honking horns, the snarling strings, the shrill whistles!”

“That’s not unlike the music of today. *Klangfarbenfunk*,” Jack spoke the travesty of German tentatively.

“Weill started all that,” Petrov said, a smirk on his face. “And Eisler: the music of political utility, he called it. I call it the music of the industrial wasteland.” He paused. “I run on, don’t I? My memories take me over!”

“Not at all,” Jack said; then he asked: “When the Nazis came to power, tell me, did you have any sense of what they were going to do?”

“I refused to see for a long time,” Petrov said softly. “But finally I did see. If the Nazis succeeded, we would all be killed. Every one of us! Impossible. Unspeakable. Beyond imagining. The grotesqueness of it, and the betrayals all around. Even people you admired, who you felt were friends, collapsed before your eyes. Of course, that could be rather melodramatic.” His face widened back into a smile. “We had to get out. Those who could escape came here!” He gestured to the room and beyond to the window, the city, the nation.

Suddenly Petrov shot up from the couch. At the hall doorway Helen appeared. Her face was white, the sallow white which olive skin becomes. She was buttoned into a flowered housecoat, red and green. In her hand was a cup of steaming liquid.

“I’m so glad you visit with Sasha,” she said, gliding up to Jack who stood unsteadily. “I wish I could be a proper hostess and talk with you myself. I do remember you as a little boy, your curly hair.”

“I understand, of course,” Jack said.

“She’s not well. Are you, Helen?”

“No, I’m not well,” she said, her clear, brown eyes gazing at her husband and then to Jack. The aroma of her coffee mixed with the odor of bedclothes and perfume. “You must excuse me. Sasha is well taking care of you, I see, with his stories about our past. I know I’ll see you again. Next time.” She vanished, yet Jack felt her presence, as if she paced the hall just outside the studio door.

Petrov strode up to the piano, saying: “Let’s have a go at some music. Did you bring any with you?” he laughed.

“Do you think there’s any more of that coffee?” Jack asked. Petrov said, “I’ll see,” and left him in the studio.

He looked at the grass-cloth-covered walls, gashed here and there but intact, with plaques and diplomas, an array of vivid, framed photographs, and bookshelves of music. An Oriental rug, frayed at the edges, stretched under the coffee table in the center of the room. The purple and black geometry of its design rose in the circle of light from a lamp by the piano, and in the gray-white light from the glass door of the studio. At the glass, Jack glimpsed the vista beyond the hillcrest, the gray gap which was LA huddling below the clouds.

Jack swallowed now from the cup of black coffee, and Petrov sat at the piano.

“As an adolescent,” he said, “I tried to screw the keys. Yes. I was twenty-one and filled with my success, the *éclat*. And I was filled with beer, so my ears buzzed. Also, I was filled with rage. At what, should I tell you?—at my ass of a father. So my ego bursting, my bladder bloated, and my heart breaking, I tried to screw the piano. Unfortunately I was too drunk to fuck. What do you want to play?”

He got up and took steady steps to the shelves of music, gesturing for Jack to come along. They agreed on late Beethoven.

“Let’s begin with opus 111 and work backwards, my boy. Next year—in Jerusalem—the Hammerklavier!”

Petrov sat down by him on the piano bench, and Jack felt the force and bulk of the man next to him, a few inches and it seemed fifty pounds bigger than he.

“Go ahead, play!”

Jack combed his hands through his hair. Then he struck the opening dissonances of opus 111. Petrov began immediately to talk above the music, shouting when the Beethoven was loud, whispering when it was soft.

“Stop!” he soon said. “You play like a composer. Like Bartok did. You have all the notes. The form. Now add the will. Not this:” In the upper register of the piano, he played the opening octaves and chords of the Maestoso, but with a swinging pulse, as if he were Duke Ellington playing a C-minor blues, meandering off the beat. “But this:” The octave leaps had decisive force, high in the treble as they were. “Now you play. Yes. It must be massive. Primitive. Slow up. And more pedal. More *shmutzig*. Dig your hands in the primordial shit. Now fast. Always with precision. With open eyes. Each beautiful fragment ironic and precise. Each pause an end to sound. Slow here. Concentrate on the structure: the branches of one tree. Faster again. Fly through that dense network. Sing. Like a bird caught there.”

Jack’s blue t-shirt was soaking as he concluded the Allegro. Petrov left him at the bench now and drifted to the glass door.

“Go on,” he said, and Jack began to work through the Arietta variations, the last twenty minutes of Beethoven’s sonatas. “See. Is your neck in a noose? No!” He spit out his words at the glass. “Did you think your hands were hooves?” The music spoke a miraculous language beyond the compass of the two men, making their ordinary human speech sound like a bleat or gasp or yelp. Petrov, quiet and distant now, sat down on the couch facing the overgrown garden in the darkening Indian summer afternoon.

* * *

As twilight descended, Jack drove home from the Petrovs, down Sunset toward the Pacific. After he had played Beethoven’s Arietta, they had sat nursing their drinks, and Petrov regaled Jack with more tales of his first years in America. The writer Thomas Mann, he said, was a reckless driver, a speeder. Could this be true? As Jack drove west, he could not be sure what was fiction and what was truth in Petrov’s words.

Suddenly a vivid queasiness took hold of him as he remembered reading Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* and then Adorno’s *Philosophy of Modern Music*. Adorno-like language began to stream

through his alcohol-polluted synapses: Everything is being transformed into an object, a thing to consume, in the administered society: art, people, music. And in the packaging process all of us without exception are being mutilated. Schoenberg's dissonance is, like Beethoven's late music, an act of resistance against the complaisant acceptance of such deformation. The music of popular media, by contrast, reinforces self-satisfaction, inculcates acquiescence, and serves the status quo. Our responsibility is to adopt perspectives which displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.

A Scotch-induced aura formed now around his fantasy of LA in the forties when Mann, Adorno, and the composers who shaped Jack's sense of what was possible in music had practiced their art, and their fellow émigrés had gathered about them to listen, to bask in the reflected radiance, to feel the force of their new music.

He imagined Mann speeding past him on Sunset, heading thirty years back toward the Petrov home.

"Welcome to Los Angeles," his dour voice must have addressed his passengers, the novelist's black Chrysler flying down the narrow, eastbound lane. His wife, Katia, would have sat on the passenger's side, her head momentarily flicking to the left with an anxiety she always censored, never giving her patrician husband the corrective glance, not to mention the words his driving deserved.

Yes, in the back behind Mann would have sat Arnold Schoenberg. The car had swung out of the circular drive in front of the composer's stucco and red-tile mansion, a dwarf by Bel-Air standards, yet deserving in this carload's opinion a Riviera view. The whited building, however—two story with arching Romanesque windows—looked out to no sea or beach, no Sansury sur Mer, but onto a similar manse across the eucalyptus lined street.

It would have been the Indian summer of 1942, and hot noontime air poured through the open car windows onto the tan Viennese Jewish composer acclimated and now a US citizen after eight years in Los Angeles. The leg of the tense man felt the touch of a woman's hip situated next to him in back of the car. Vera Stravinsky sat by him, and on the other side of Vera sat his great antipode in music, Igor Stravinsky. Petrov had arranged it: a unique and never documented meeting.

Carefully dressed, sweating, and bespectacled, Igor tilted his head into the wind from the open window and peered out over UCLA as it spread down the mountain by the careening car. Below were hills and meadows out of which rose the redbrick tower of Royce Hall. Stravinsky, the Russian and now Russian-American composer, had arrived with his wife by cab to breakfast at the Manns (smoked salmon, “Canadian” bacon—the rage at the time—and eggs, over-easy, scrambled, and sunny-side up). Then on the way to their destined appointment, they’d picked up Arnold Schoenberg, whose car was in the shop and whose wife looked after their son, Lawrence.

As they hurtled past the wild western academy to their right and Bel-Air’s burgeoning little enclave on the left, the two composers and the writer yelled to one another above the engine noise and the hot Santa Ana air rushing in on them. Vera Stravinsky and Katia Mann interjected comments antiphonally. Impeccable Thomas Mann sped the car toward Beverly Hills. Their shouts drifted in and out of four languages. They spoke of the campus they passed, their fates in LA, the world war’s engulfing evil.

Now a forest, spotted with yellowing green oases, rolled down the hill on Stravinsky’s side, into the valley below. Mann suddenly turned his head, his hands planted on the wheel of the speeding Chrysler.

“Here is the golf course for Protestants only,” Mann said with some acidity, and he glanced at Stravinsky, whose mouth was about to form the words ‘this fucking war;’ “and to the south is one for Jews.” Schoenberg sat in silence behind the German novelist.

The Russian’s mouth narrowed. The little man leaned forward and spoke into Mann’s ear, in a suddenly British lisp: “If you ask me, both Protestant and Jewish greens are mediocre. Too low for high praise, too brown for fair praise, too little for great praise!”

Mann smiled, and Katia Mann winced. Vera Stravinsky placed her hand on her husband’s knee, and Schoenberg’s left hand tightened on the hot, black skin of the car outside the window. Finally, they wheeled by the Beverly Hills Hotel, awash in a new coat of pink paint and rung round by a trim girdle of new-planted palms. The novelist swerved the car to the left, up Benedict Canyon, past isolated compounds and the occasional, rambling shack. The car circled far up the canyon road toward the Petrov mansion. Rising above Los Angeles, the passengers stared at the city’s rectangles of orange groves, its tracts of bungalows, its stretches of indistinguishable brush and farmland, the long perpendiculars of its boulevards and highways, the tiny dots of its new buildings, and the amazing finality of the Pacific far to the west.

Mann parked at the foot of a hill rising toward the Petrov's green lawn on the crest. As they emerged from the car, Igor turned to Arnold: "Too bad Bartok is not here, to complete our little triumvirate. This week poor Bela must tickle the ivories at some concert in Portland or Seattle."

Perhaps that was what it was like, fevered and off-beat, pervaded by the gratuitous energy of those who had hoodwinked certain death and arrived in LA almost too late, a bunch of brilliant escapees occupying assorted hillside homes and beachfront properties—certainly more regal, Jack thought, than his own Venice bungalow, which he now approached in his battered, green VW bug.

Erect and on the verge of climax, he kept slipping from Janice: the unwitting need of his body was to leap, as if he were diving beyond the woman beneath him into some abyss. The askew, offbeat syncopation interrupted the riveting ostinato of their coupling.

“Hold still,” she said. She wrapped her thin arms around him, quieting his pulsing buttocks, and she rolled him over onto his back. He slipped into her again, and soon Janice rose on her knees, her arms stretching out like wings, her head tilting up and facing the ceiling of his bedroom. Together, they resembled a bird seeking flight, a dove or falcon, with Jack’s hairy thighs and knees supporting her body, which thrust up toward the sky. She was calling out, as if her “Jack” or “fuck” confirmed the heightened state they attained.

Later, he wrapped his limbs around her and began to doze in the light of noon, filtering from the windows closed against the fog enveloping Venice in late October. As he fell to sleep, she slipped away from the bed. He was in flight, soaring beyond a precipice, and he heard a shattering music, as if he were an orchestra playing at highest pitch and volume, his bones the instruments, his flesh the staggering sound. Suddenly he was standing on the stage, hidden amid the shuddering basses and cellos, the violas and violins crying out in brief, aching shouts. All vanished. He sat there at a Steinway, composing this music, his sonata.

Guitars shrieked above a constant punching beat, and a male voice shouted the lyrics of a violent ride, up, up to the top, then down, down to the bottom, and then again up, up. Jack pulled on his jeans and walked through the hall to the living room. She was sitting on the rug in front of the shelves of records, books, and music along the side wall of the room. The records at the bottom were ranged on long, wooden boards supported by occasional, gray cement cinder blocks. She wore a blue workshirt of his. A cup of coffee was on the floor by her.

“I’ve never known anyone with so many records,” she cried above the blare. He went to get a cup of coffee that smelled from the kitchen.

The climax of Helter Skelter approached, the shouted warning of crushing descent into breakdown, and then the ultimate judgment rendered: the lover might couple, but the lover made

no music and could not dance. Then they let distortion loose. The empty white album—the Beatles, a present from an old girlfriend in Cleveland—was leaning against the bottom shelf.

“You know, that song was part of Manson’s defense: it told him to do what he did, supposedly. It was subliminal,” she said with disgust, as she turned over the record on the player. She coupled, yes, but could she dance?

“He was still convicted. The courts don’t accept music as a defense,” Jack said.

“I know, it was bullshit. They were all like that. Bobby Beausoleil used to come down to Venice, looking like a virgin hippie. Five years ago and it seems like yesterday. He fucked a number of people around here: and I mean fucked them up good.” Down, down he swooped, crushing whoever was in the way of his descent .

Now the lyrics of Revolution Number One filled the room, a one and a two, a four count no account melody, sweet and shallow, mocking politics, activism, anything but what was sweet and shallow.

“Why don’t you play Revolution Number Nine?” Jack said, wandering to the upright Knabe in the corner between the shelves and his large writing table under the windows. He held his coffee mug in his left hand, and with his right he began to play the tune they heard. Stressing the shoo of the shoobedo, he parodied the parody. She laughed, and when the song ended, she lifted the needle off the record.

He put his mug on the top of the piano and with both hands began playing a sound he vaguely recalled or imagined. Within him, he heard a confused music, generated by sounds or voices beyond the world, it seemed. He tried to reproduce the music on the piano. He played a set of shuddering trills, and they resembled the long, isolated trills which rang out an apocalyptic alarm in the sixth variation of Beethoven’s opus 111, except Jack’s trills encompassed the keyboard, both base and treble at highest volume: a quadruple alarm inferno. Then he alternated and shortened the trills. They became a version of the trills lashing out at the climax in the middle of the Hammerklavier’s fugue.

“Jack, I’m going. It’s Saturday, and there are things I have to take care of.” She was dressed now and staring at him.

“I got distracted.”

“That’s all right. I have to go anyway,” she said and kissed him on the neck. He reached to bring her thin face to his, to kiss her mouth, to confirm the sweetness of the connection

between them. Then he returned to his four-alarm fire. But the sound he produced was not the sound he recalled or imagined, and he stopped. He walked to the long shelves, gazed at the sixteen feet of records, and pulled from one end a Vox album of Penderecki. He played the *Stabat Mater* at the start of side two.

Suddenly, helplessly, he imagined his mother sitting next to Helen Petrov in 1942, the two women on the music room couch and surrounded by émigré intellectuals at Petrov's Indian summer party. Noise filled the room, bouncing off the polished oak floor and rising up to reverberate off the high ceiling with its embedded redwood beams. The luminous blue and red oriental rugs below could not muffle or tame the room's overloaded acoustics. Petrov had just finished playing Schoenberg's *Suite opus 25*; lighting a cigar, he stood glowing and loquacious in front of the composer.

Rosa Weinstein—effervescent, pregnant, and due next March—whispered over the din to Helen, loudly enough for Adorno sitting on her other side to hear: “I love the cheese ball,” and she pointed to the appetizer on the sideboard. Like Jack a lover of food, his mother-to-be asked, “How do you make it?” Helen Petrov spoke her recipe quietly, only the essentials, but enough for this American to understand. Then Rosa pointed at another dish and another. The recipes poured out in Helen's quiet accent, with traces of Greek from her Athens childhood, and German from her studies in Berlin with Edwin Fischer and then her marriage there to Alexander Petrov. The cheese ball: mash cheddar and blue (domestic now because of the War) with cream cheese; be sure to crush some garlic into it, and then once blended and formed, encrust the ball with walnut halves. The sweet eggplant: bake two eggplants—make sure to pierce them first, or they'll burst—and scoop them out into a pan of onion and parsley you've sautéed in olive oil and some salt; mix it altogether with a cup of mild, white Monterey Jack cheese (do you know Monterey, those beautiful beaches down the coast from San Francisco?), and then bake it until all melts together. The taramasalata... “Do you know,” Adorno interrupted, lifting a cigarette to his mouth, “the beaches of Los Angeles?” Of course, Helen said with a sort of authoritative glee: Long Beach, Redondo Beach, Newport Beach, Santa Monica Beach, Sunset Beach, Malibu Beach, not to mention Venice. Et cetera!

Sudden, aching shouts and whispers of *Christe, Christe*—the agonized chorus of Penderecki's *Stabat Mater*—penetrated his consciousness, and at that moment the music of his dream came back to him. It was music he would now add to the sketches for his sonata, which

were filling his notebook. First he took the record from the turntable, slipped the vinyl into its jacket, and replaced it in his collection.

The young man's collection was emblematic of his life. Confronted with the fullness of experience, he sought to affirm whatever signs of life he could find. The collection of records to which he listened was helplessly eclectic. As for the people to whom he listened, Jack was open to them in ways he did not fathom or control—like a latter-day version of Mann's Hans Castorp, exploring this new magic mountain by the Pacific. No accident then that the outer layer of his consciousness was especially permeable, admitting myriad forms of life which poured in on him: some he was familiar with, some he could not track, and some were creations thrust upon him from he knew not where—and these too he struggled to affirm, just as he strove to affirm signs of life in whatever touched or aroused him.

As for his record collection, six inches (or more) of records were devoted to each of the following composers (arranged, seminally, by birth year): Bach—1685 and twelve inches, Mozart—1756 and another foot, Beethoven—1770, eighteen inches and the cigar, Schubert—1797 and eight inches, Schumann and Chopin—1810 and a basic six each, Verdi and Wagner—1813 and eight inches of boxed sets each, Brahms—1833 and eight, Mahler—1860 and again eight of mostly boxed sets, and almost every recorded work (at least the basic six inches for each) of Schoenberg—1874, Bartok—1881, and Stravinsky—1882.

In addition, there were recordings of music by other composers: twenty composers before Vivaldi (1678—two inches) and Handel (1685—three inches); seventeen composers born in the eighteenth century (for example, Haydn—1732, with five inches of potent quality); seventy born in the nineteenth century (including Liszt—1811 and two inches, Debussy—1862 and over ditto inches, Webern and Varese—1883, Berg and Leverkühn—1885, Eisler, Dick, and Gershwin—1898, Weill, Arax, and Copland—1900, etc.); and a myriad composers born in the twentieth century (for example, Shostakovich—1906, Carter and Messiaen—1908, Zimmermann and Bernstein—1918, Xenakis and Hazelrig—1921, Rorem, Flanagan, and Ligeti—1923, culminating with as many recordings as he could find of Penderecki—1933, as well as a host of other “voices” up to the most recent solace and cacophony).

Not to mention the jazz, the rock, the folk, and...

Jack was sitting at the large table where he worked at his notebook of music paper containing the sketches and journal of 1972. At the top of the page on which he was composing his sonata, he had jotted the following entry last night.

Oct. 20: A decade separates us, I told Janice. She said generations last three years now, maybe three months. Nothing you can do about it, honey, except lead your life the best you can. Amen to that. It's like a festival for me with her. Yes, she says, whatever happens to the two of us, that's the way to remember it, with no sense of violation or license. Except can't find enough time to work on sonata.

He began to draft a passage in the middle of the first movement. At one moment he looked up from the notes he inked on the staves before him. *The pale Hungarian wandered into the living room. The old man sat down by him. He had sallow cheeks, small clear eyes, and blond-white wisps of hair trailing about his head. A numinous pallor illumined his skin, and a smile formed on his mouth. It was as if his eyes had witnessed all that Jack or anyone did, and yet the eyes and mouth smiled.*

"The rhythm is good, always shifting, searching, never predictable: everything from 2/4 to 15/16. And the terrible trills: they are good."

Jack laid his pen down and stared out toward the ocean. The fog was burning off; even now when it was nearly November, the sun had begun to draw bare bodies onto the cool sand.

"I first began seriously to compose when I was twenty-one. It was 1903, and my rite of passage was the first performance in Budapest of Also Sprach Zarathustra. Strauss came to conduct. What a gift he gave. To make available in music, just twenty-five years later, the essence of Nietzsche! New sound, new vision—ironic and bountiful at once."

The Hungarian's voice was thin and shy, yet it flowed out: "Zarathustra taught me to listen as a child listens. Keep the whole surface of your consciousness clear of all great imperatives, all great gestures or poses. To become what you are, you must not have the faintest notion of what you are."

He folded his slender, ravaged hands on the dark-brown wood of the table before him. "In you, all opposites must coalesce. But that is the problem: how does the spirit which bears the heaviest fate and the deepest task nevertheless become the lightest and most transcendent? To do so, you must live as you play or dance or compose, and do these as you live. Joy in the reality of life—even in the tragic, the ugly, the dissonant—grows from just such playing and composing

and soaring beyond all ordinary hearing. Dionysian joy experienced even in pain is the source of your art and life. That is what your music must reveal. The playful construction and destruction of everything in your world is the overflow of delight.”

“Excellent, Herr Nietzsche,” the thin Russian said as he burst into the room and plopped onto Jack’s couch. The Hungarian gave him a long, wry glance from his seat at the table. The third visitor sat on the stuffed easy chair by the couch. “As for our handsome young man: an excellent performance from you, Mr. Weinstein,” the Russian continued, extending his arms like wings over the top of the couch, throwing his head back, and shouting: “Jack!”

The tanned Viennese Jew began to speak from his chair: “If you think Strauss conducting Zarathustra was a revelation, you should have heard Mahler in Krefeld, conducting his Third Symphony. I couldn’t speak. I could hardly breathe.”

He stopped dead still. Then his sensuous voice continued: “In the last movement, he took the adagio theme from Beethoven’s last quartet and transfigured it, revealing the height reached only by one who soars beyond resignation to joy. He stood before the huge orchestra and, with almost no motion, made them play the massive chords with such clarity and loudness that I felt an engulfing terror. Then they played with such quiet—even unto silence—for seconds, for minutes, that here as in the face of the loudest weight of tone, sounds began to cry out helplessly in my chest.”

Tears came from Jack’s eyes as he stared before him. They welled from a hidden source. He too knew such sounds, and they would become the sounds of his sonata.

“Mahler was inventing the future where we now live,” he swept his arm in the air of Jack’s apartment and seemed to include them all. “Earlier, in the Misterioso, the contralto sang Zarathustra’s song: What does the midnight say? How deep is life’s sorrow! Yet deeper still is joy, and joy seeks eternity. That is the world our dissonant souls seek to inhabit; we yearn to be liberated into eternity. ‘Cancel all hope, yet send me the light!’”

The Viennese Jew rose from his chair. He walked to the shelves of books and music, passing the Russian on the couch, who said: “Oh my god, another Nietzschean. Is this eternally recurrent as well? Give me chance over fate anytime.”

“Pay no attention to him,” said the Jew, who turned his back on them and began to note the contents of Jack’s shelves.

“I was born to determinism,” the Russian said, “to be eternally damned as the child of a collapsing land, but I have escaped my fate. Can you be liberated into eternity? I escaped! I survived by probability and sleight of hand.” He fixed his round eyes on Jack. “I was born out of time, and now I tell time by no clock or watch. I would have been more suited by temperament to the early eighteenth century, to be a minor Bach living in anonymity, devoted to the service; I would have composed three times as much. Protect your talent, Jack. There will be momentary setbacks, and there will be genuine losses. For this is no time for music. What is its function here and now? Where is the money to feed your talent? Life is a game of chance, and to survive you must learn the rules and trust to determination and probability. Bonne chance.”

Jack composed now at this desk, working further on his sonata. Its dense network—root and vine, blossom and leaf—grew across the lines of his music book. The themes he took from the Hammerklavier entwined the pages of his score. Beethoven’s leaps echoed there in continual antiphony.

The next day, Jack made a second Sunday visit to Benedict Canyon. Petrov had agreed to monthly sessions with him, and their plan was to work crab-like, backwards through the late Beethoven sonatas. On the phone this morning, the old man had told him to bring along a copy of one of his own compositions. Just before two in the afternoon, Jack turned his VW left off Sunset and passed the palms circling the Beverly Hills Hotel, pink and green, and receding from the corner of Benedict Canyon Drive. The day was bright and smoggy. When he parked his Bug at the foot of the Petrovs' path, he left his sweater in the car and locked it. In a green tee-shirt and jeans, Jack walked again up the weedy path; in his hand was an envelope containing a copy of his Variations. By the garage, a gray jeep was parked, canvas-covered and a few years old.

As Jack approached the front stairs, he glanced at the yard gone to seed. He saw Mrs. Petrov hunched over at the end of the lawn. Her legs stuck out wide in front of her, and the long grass curled over her house coat. Her head of gray hair was bent forward, and Jack thought she was in trouble. He walked toward her and saw that she worked with a trowel in her hand. Leaning over the flowerbed, she seemed rooted in the yard.

“Jack!” she said, looking up and squinting in the sun. Her voice was labored and breathy. “Look at my chrysanthemums.”

He hunkered down on the weedy lawn by her and admired the variety of blooms, rust and gold, purple, white and pink.

“This corner, at least, I keep up,” she said. “Sasha doesn't like me to, but I can't help it. I love chrysanthemums. And the season lasts so long here in California.”

“These are beautiful,” Jack said, looking at the spider mums and the bunches of blossoms, double and triple normal size.

“He thinks I do this from defiance,” she said. “Little does he know.”

“Defiance?”

“He used to scream at our son when he played in the flowerbed. Even to beat him. I would run out here and throw myself between them.”

She looked beyond the flowers to the rim of hills. She said slowly, “He's a big man. A powerful man. Imposing and enthralling. He likes you, Jack. My husband is impressed with you. But be careful. We all need protection in this life. My Sarah needs it. I certainly do. Even you need it. Now you go in. I think I'll take a rest. I don't feel very well.”

“Can I help you?” he said, reaching out his hand to her arm, and she looked at him with her dark, exacting eyes.

“You are Julius's and Rosa's kind son. No, Jack, I'll manage. I'll stay just a few more minutes. You go on in.”

Jack walked up to the front entry. When he pushed the ringer button, Sarah Petrov opened the door. She reached her hand out to shake his. Her wavy, dark-gold hair was tied back, and a rope of it trailed over the thin, embroidered fabric covering her shoulder.

“Father's not quite ready,” she said in a high, clear voice. “My name is Sarah.”

“I'm Jack. We met after your Dad's concert, at the beginning of the month.”

“I remember,” she said, smiling with quiet confidence. “My father speaks quite highly of you, you know.”

Jack wondered what Mrs. Petrov had meant about Sarah, for she seemed in no need of protection, with her quiet alertness and the astonishing clarity of her voice. She walked with Jack through the dark hall, past the living and the dining rooms, to the music studio. They sat on couches opposite each other. The composer's back was to the sliding glass door with its green curtains pulled open. Sunlight brightened the room. A flower-pattern was woven around the collar and down the front of her white blouse, Greek or Mexican, it seemed. She wore a leather skirt which stopped above her knee, and her body filled the clothes fully. A quiet pride and singularity sounded in her voice as she responded to his questions.

“I live here. And my business is here. I manage performers and musicians, especially my father. And now my brother—the out-of-town arrangements, the concerts, Joey's new recording contract.”

“Your brother's? Your Dad no longer performs much, does he?”

“Except once a year at UCLA.” She hesitated. Then she seemed to decide to go on. “His heart attack was three years ago. But even before that, Father was sick of performing in public: ‘The carnival,’ he'd say. Now he calls it his extended sabbatical.” She offered him something to

drink. She was having a coke with ice, and he would too. She leaned over the liquor cabinet, pouring their colas, reaching into the bucket for ice which stuck to her hands.

“I can't get over how fine this canyon is,” he said. “It's like living in the mountains, except for the smog. All the trees, the brush, the high hills.”

“Have you seen Laurel, two canyons over?”

“I've never driven through. It's a huge city. Impossible to...”

“Laurel is more developed. I lived there a few years ago.” Again, she hesitated. Perhaps it was the imprimatur of her father's regard for Jack that made her continue. Her high voice never lost its assumption of intense separateness, yet now she spoke with warmth and a seductive openness; she seemed to take pleasure in her apparent trust of him. “Now, you know, Laurel *is* a carnival. The adults become adolescent, the young become goddamn infants.”

He heard names of her friends and acquaintances, recognizing some of them, Sebastian and Nash and Taylor and Simon and Collins and Young. And the names of drugs.

“I lived in the apartment above a garage on Neil's grounds—a sort of converted mews. I used to photograph the band.”

“Are these photographs on the wall yours?” Jack asked. “You took them?”

“Some of them,” she said casually. “I lived with Rick, a guitarist who worked for Neil. What a scene! For two years among all those fucking flower children. Then three years ago, I moved home. I haven't smoked any shit since. I don't want any of that.”

“I know what you went through, I think. What years those were.” He leaned forward on the couch, one hand making a loose fist in front of him. He was absorbed by her Mediterranean eyes, and there was a kinship and call in her voice. The sound he heard seemed to connect with the sounds his music tried to bring into being. “I can understand how you feel,” he told her.

“You can understand how I feel,” she said, with a vague vulnerability, as if the two of them were caught for a moment inside a dream or movie, and then she seemed to wake herself, laughing.

“I still love Neil Young's music,” she said, her voice suddenly teasing. “Have you heard his latest album?”

“I've heard Heart of Gold on the radio,” Jack said, and he began to sing, ironic and too fast, that he wanted to live, he wanted to give.

He stopped, but she continued the song, her soprano voice forming an envelope of isolation around her as she sang now that she too was a miner for a heart of gold, for the true words and feelings she never could find; weary and yearning, though, she keep on searching. Again she began to laugh.

Petrov walked in, smoking a cigar.

“What have we here?” There was censure in his voice, and his face stiffened. He must have listened from the hall. “Romeo and Juliet?”

“Father,” Sarah stood now, “I’m glad you’re feeling better,” she said with a smile.

“I’m fine, thank you,” he said. He greeted Jack, shaking his hand. “Helen gives her regrets again. She’s under the weather.”

“Yes, I saw her in the garden. I’m sorry she’s not feeling well,” Jack said to his host, who turned away to the liquor cabinet.

“I’ll see you again, I’m sure,” Sarah was leaving, and he shook the slender hand she held out formally to him.

“What can I get you to drink?” Petrov asked from the cabinet, pouring himself a Scotch.

“I’ll finish what I have, thanks.”

Petrov sat down where his daughter had sat. The man’s vigor and bulk filled the indented couch.

“Don’t believe everything Sarah tells you, Jack; she’s a bit subjective, I should say. Her ‘scene’ was not very romantic. Squalor, she lived in. And I know whose fault it was: a so-called musician. He hypnotized her, the son-of-a-bitch. But that is all in the past. He’s no longer a consideration. So, Jack, how are you doing?”

“I’ve started to earn my keep,” he answered cautiously. “You know, at the UA studios on Melrose? I’m doing some arranging for...”

“Son of a bitch! Bruno Fried—he worked at UA too! I told you about Bruno, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you mentioned him...”

“He was a composer/arranger, as they say. Starting in 1940. He worked for Max Steiner and hated every minute: Studio work, he would way, fuck it, fuck it! Steiner had studied with Mahler in Vienna; of course that didn’t prevent him from composing crap. But he respected my friend, and with good reason. Bruno was such a fine, gifted man. He understood the hell we inhabited during the war. I remember his voice filling this room: ‘I can’t even play my violin,’

he'd say. 'Moving my fingers on the strings—just pure habit—is impossible. We are frozen men, Sasha. No home, no life, only death everywhere.' He knew, Jack, he understood. It was not only the death, the war, not only the kitsch everywhere, then as now, not only the hell of what your wife or child puts you through. It is the isolation, the being alone of your spirit. What do they say: face the music? When we face ourselves, we are totally alone. What do you think, Jack, really? You think it's easy?"

"No, Sasha. It isn't easy, for anyone. My god, not at all," Jack said. "What happened to Bruno Fried?"

"Bruno was so poor, you have no idea. Especially when he first arrived. Once at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Wallis paid him ten dollars to jump in the pool with his clothes on. Bruno was a friend and fellow-traveler of Hans Eisler, Oscar Fisch, and Teddy Adorno—you know their work?" Petrov asked, lifting his glass to drink.

"I studied some of Eisler's music. And I've read some Adorno," Jack said. "Vaguely I remember, did Oscar Fisch work with Kenneth Anger, on a film?"

"Well then, you know about them," Petrov almost shouted. "Bruno, Oscar, Hans, and Teddy were all Marxists! May I tell you a story?" Petrov asked with a smile.

"Yes, of course," Jack said.

"Now, I was not personally a Marxist, but I liked Marxists. Especially the snobs among them. That was Bruno!" Petrov glanced intensely at Jack and then, with animation and a certain urgency, he began his story.

"Remember I was telling you about my grand party in 1942. It was just before my first benefit concert at UCLA. That afternoon, Bruno and Teddy, the Marxists, had an argument with Igor Stravinsky. Yes! I was about to play Igor's Sonata—for *him*. But first I said: 'Before the war, before fascism descended, Igor wrote this Sonata. I play it now in memoriam for our earlier lives, there in Europe.'

"Suddenly Igor started up, and I froze at the keys. 'In 1924,' he said, 'I composed it in Paris. In an extraordinary state of readiness: I always love that feeling of awakening—to life. Not that feelings have anything to do with it.'

"'Feelings have nothing to do with it?'" Teddy piped up.

“‘I prefer feelings,’ Igor said, ‘if they must be called so, that are concealed in form, that obey the rules of the game. Your feelings and my feelings are much less interesting than form itself.’

“‘Teddy answered, first puffing on his cigarette: ‘But I always hear a definite pathos in your music, the pathos for the past. And for the vanishing present too. Your Russian tunes or your Pergolesi tunes or your Tchaikovsky tunes. Always the nostalgia for what is and was. But I never hear the pathos of becoming, of discovery. I mean of what may yet be.’ Now everyone was smoking away, Teddy at his cigarette, also Mann and Werfel; Igor had lit one of my cigars, and me too! It was as if we all were exchanging smoke signals. I gave up waiting at the piano and sat down on an easy chair to listen.

“‘The pathos of what may yet be?’ Igor said. ‘I am not an anarchist. Feeling that demonstrates itself as some blind stab at the future—as a “spontaneous” eruption—is false, grotesque, even absurd. Games require rules!’

“‘Pardon me,’ Teddy said, ‘you don’t understand. In music other than yours, I hear another relationship between feeling and...’

“‘You mean Beethoven!’ Igor practically shouted. ‘Pardon me, but *you* don’t understand: I wrote the Adagio of my Sonata after I made a study of Beethoven, especially the Adagio of his opus 31 number 3. Before that, I couldn’t bear how emotive his rhetoric is. His “pathos!” False! But then I understood. In the first place, Beethoven isn’t conveying his “emotions” at all, but his musical ideas. And in the slow movements, how prodigal those ideas are! Even more radical than in his sonata expositions. How inevitable every line, every ornament, every...’

“‘Suddenly Bruno interrupted Igor, and everyone turned to my friend, whose eyes glanced about the room and whose tongue roved about in his cheek: ‘For sure, you are only at the beginning of understanding Beethoven. “Prodigal! Radical! Inevitable!” Or maybe you’re at the very end of understanding him. In our day, to listen and respond has become mere habit, formula, cliché—for you, for me, for the whole fucking world. When this happens, when something vital becomes a thing, memory dies and bodies turn to ashes. A permanent forgetting is about to occur, Igor, and that will truly be hell. Don’t eulogize Beethoven, or he’ll become just one more monument. The next step is Nazi shit.’

“‘Then Teddy’s patrician voice rose up. The words poured from him, blending Marx and Nietzsche according to his own special recipe. My Helen was sitting next to him on the couch,

and as he spoke she got up and swam through the cloud of smoke from the cigars and cigarettes and went to open the glass door.

“‘Igor,’ Teddy said, ‘in what you say and what you compose, I hear a latent message: an identification with the authoritarian. Yes, Beethoven plays the game brilliantly—all that disciplined force and invention. But there is another mode of his creating, and of listening to him: for Beethoven is breaking new ground of feeling. Always, he strives to explode the game rules so that he can join discipline with *freedom*, objectivity and subjectivity, game-playing with the risk of discovery. But for you...for you form is only objective, only the game, as you say. You acquiesce to the authoritarian trend of our age. Music is a language game for you, and that’s your guarantee of authenticity. Your melodies and rhythms and harmonies advertise themselves as the positivist absolute, all that can be. Accept them! Embrace them! Nothing else is. After all, it’s all according to Hoyle: ‘I am not an anarchist!’” You could hear a pin drop after Adorno’s mockery, it resounded so in the room.

“Then Igor said elegantly, his eyebrows raised: ‘I’m always unprepared for the explosions my music is attended by, whether the revulsion or the fawning.’”

“Teddy said nothing. And what could he say, anyway, in this beautiful room surrounded by my oriental rugs and the oak floors and that magnificent piano, waiting for me to play it! Could he say, your brilliant music is false and has the logic of the shit hole, or it should be so lucky? No! Though I must say, such a scream of soul would have been interesting to hear. Excessive, of course. And incorrect about Igor! Anyway Teddy remembered the possibility of another appointment, or maybe he needed to go home to Gretel. He stood before Helen and gave his apologies. ‘I must leave,’ he kept saying. He shook my hand warmly, then each of the others’, including Stravinsky’s!

“‘You’re sure you must go, Teddy?’ Bruno said, when Adorno approached. I remember so vividly, as they shook hands Bruno reached to hold Teddy’s arm. I liked them both so much, you know. Especially Bruno. He united the best of the Jew and the German, especially Germans like Stefan George, you know his work? Usually the Germanic is so insufferable when it speaks on its own, but it became brilliant and ironic in Bruno. What seemed like deference was really sarcasm. ‘The next step is Nazi shit!’ He could be acid. But you know, finally, he killed himself. And not because he worked at United Artists. He lost his family at Auschwitz.”

“My god,” Jack sighed. The room was suddenly silent. Then Jack said, “It was Adorno who said to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”

“Really? And have you brought any of your own work with you?” Petrov smiled and pointed to the large, brown envelope on the coffee table between them. His own brand of poetry, Jack thought.

“Yes,” he said and unclasped the envelope; “I’ll have some of that Scotch now, if it’s okay.” He walked to the Steinway, not sitting on the bench, only placing the score on the music holder. Petrov handed him a glass of watered Scotch and sat down before the music.

“Variations for Piano. Don’t give anything away.” Petrov looked at each of the eighteen pages, several of them with fleeting sweeps of notes over only a few prestissimo bars, others with many bars in adagio. When he got to the bottom of the last page, he went back to the top of the first, stopped and turned to Jack, who stood by him. “While not constant,” he said in his fluid, accented voice, “your direction is firmly fixed. You’re an incorrigible revolutionary. You know I did some composing in my day. Sometime I’ll show you. May I play this?”

“Of course,” Jack said. “I’d be grateful. You’ll play it now?” He sat on the worn plush red armchair near the piano and heard Petrov mumble and then begin striking the keys. Sight-reading the score, he maneuvered among the theme’s rhythms with phenomenal precision. Jack took a swig of the Scotch, which teetered in his hand. With immediate mastery, at sight, Petrov played almost twice as fast as Jack had conceived his piece. Always before he had played it emotively, with an apocalyptic cast. This pianist was exposing the music’s true character. He was playing it as if he were a being from an alien time and space, fallen to Earth to reconnoiter. Experimental sonorities became transparent; brutal rhythms became fresh and springing, and they alternated with passages of inhuman delicacy.

Petrov laughed aloud as he moved from variation to variation. “Chopin!” he shouted, his hands sweeping up and down the keyboard, quoting the double octave runs of a late etude, but transmogrified now into an avalanche of dissonance, a pure and tragi-comic motion without consonance or center, plummeting into the silence of the break. Each of Jack’s travesties and quotations—of Chopin or Liszt, Schumann or Schubert, Beethoven, Bach or Brahms—sounded now like the visitation of an angel or a god descending into chaos, bestriding a time each had not dreamed could exist. Petrov began the last variation warily, as if finally this were a new earth and heaven, yet soon he was oriented to its assumption of freedom, the oddity of its sense of

space and motion, the strange and brave sonorities, the keys scattering sparks of tone, scintillant and aflame, a phoenix taking flight. This ascending god of new sound was a Dionysus, not merely of the fucking root but of garlands and aureoles of flowers he gentled into being.

“Christ,” Petrov boomed with laughter, which echoed in the studio as he finished. “Did you have to make it this difficult!”

“Unbelievable,” Jack kept saying, his green tee-shirt wet with sweat as if he had played the Variations. “Your playing! Unbelievable. Unbelievable.” He rose as the old man stood and headed for the liquor cabinet. The younger man—with his brown hair sweaty and looking electrocuted—walked up to him, took his hand, and shook it. “Thanks,” he said. “I’m amazed.”

“So am I,” Petrov said and with his free hand raised his glass in the air. “I drink to your work. You’re quite a composer.” He swallowed. “And, I must say, quite a thief.”

Jack burst out laughing, and the two men sat down on the couches opposite each other. “You know the lesson of the masters: anything, in or out of the canon, is fair game. It’s not learning and using what you learn that cripples. It’s gentility, not giving one’s all to art. But, my god, you plunder the corpus of the canon like the devil!” The studio, like a demonic den, resounded with laughter, knowing and unknowing.

“You know the sonata I was telling you about, Igor’s?”

“Of course. Now in that work, Stravinsky didn’t hesitate to ‘borrow,’” Jack said. “From Bach, from Beethoven, as you said.”

“I feel like playing it! You mind?” Petrov gave Jack a warm, almost fevered smile, and he went to the sit again at the Steinway. In a sweeping movement his big, long-fingered hands began the first movement, *Commodo*. Jack realized his touch had drastically changed: now it was motoric, a detached legato—a sound capable of constructing or destroying at whim, transforming whatever it contacted, and always with elegant insouciance. The grand piano sounded like a beautiful machine, humming out the mock-baroque figure Stravinsky “borrowed,” and it unfolded, in turn cynical and seductive, indifferent and incandescent. When a sinuous melody rose up in the treble, its graced gestures became knowing exposures. The terrain of the such melody was beyond the terrain of irony; there was not a crevice or rift in this wall of sheer play where the spirit might hook a fingernail.

After the first movement, Petrov said: “When I played this for Igor, I overheard him whisper to Mann, ‘Listen to this extraordinary Jew, how he gives himself to my piece—heart,

mind, and soul to boot. I must use him to perform other things!” Petrov turned then and flashed a smile at Jack, a strange, almost maniacal smile, filled with unspoken pride and rage and knowledge.

He began the Adagietto, summoning up the ghost of Beethoven. In slow time, the left hand sounded a motoric four beats per measure with self-conscious regularity and an occasional pirouette which numbed any purpose Beethoven might have imagined for such an accompanying figure. In the treble, an elegant, heavily painted, salon-version of a Beethovenian tune was dragged out, sullen in its dress of travesty, its over-wrought trills, decorative runs, and drunken arpeggios. Drugged and decorated, the melody grew more and more grotesque, yet it was beyond all sense of horror or loss or ugliness. This was not a dance of death, it was purely a dance, an elegant game.

Immediately, then, Jack heard the Finale soar out, another gigue, a beautiful and machine-like travesty of baroque momentum. There were occasional pointed, Mephistophelean assertions with octave drops and percussive decoration, and then a neo-classical anthem of salon elegance. Louder and louder, any tension the gigue generated was transmuted into pure motion and resolved finally by the sweetly consonant chords.

Petrov got up and walked up to his single clapping listener.

“Igor rose when I went up to him afterward. On his little face, there was a delighted grin, and he said: ‘I’m so pleased, Sasha!’”

“He must have been amazed,” Jack said, “how brilliant his work sounds when you play it, and how true you are to its essence!” He reached toward his new friend’s hand and arm. With an unstable blend of warmth and formality, they shook hands, and Jack imagined the Russian composer, thirty years before, pumping the Jew’s big, heavy, magical hand.

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Through late October and the start of November, Jack searched for the hours at night and on weekends to compose his sonata. Amid the draft unfolding on the musical staves in his 1972 Notebook, he made several journal entries during these autumn weeks. Among them were the following:

Oct. 29: Two weeks since my last Sunday afternoon with the Petrovs, and it still amazes me: what a revelation, how he unveiled the Variations. Am deeply moved too by his memories, his wonderful stories! Even if he’s polishing and burnishing them, it’s astounding how he

captures the essence of those amazing people who created the music I love. Just like his ability in playing to capture the essence of the music—case in point: the Stravinsky sonata, and my Variations! Also saw Sarah, now for the second time. She reminds me of Molly, without the limitations, i.e., the law-school careerism. (Of course, I am not the Jack I was when I was insulated inside the circle of academic life.) Her high voice has a beautiful intensity and tenderness, both. She is somehow hurt, isolated, but ambitious too, somehow, in spirit. A sort of muse: in her presence I feel I can bring something to life, in myself, in her; I find myself wanting to surround her vulnerability, to protect her. But from what?

Oct. 31: Halloween Tuesday. Only a few kids braved the salt air for candy, my dumdums and gum. Tomorrow will bring the day of the dead, but not here, elsewhere.

Every workday, Jack drove to a cluster of two story buildings on the edge of Hollywood, fifteen miles from the ocean. There he worked with Brian and with Jerry, the music director for The Getaway. Jack was brought in “basically to listen and learn,” Brian explained, avuncular and his British accent dense with Americanisms. He looked about forty, with a thick, reddish-blond mustache and thinning, blond hair brushed back behind his ears. He was Jerry Fielding's fireman, he said, his jack-of-all-trades, his workhorse.

“Listen to me,” Brian had said on the first day. He was a union man and had made sure Jack was a Federation musician. “Show up and do your fucking work, drudgery or not. That's the *minimum*, and some of our ‘colleagues’ hardly do that! Once you show up and do competent work, they *owe* you. You know you'll get benefits. Fuck yes. We worked damned hard for them. You'll understand when you have a family.” He sucked on the Cavendish in his pipe, and a crowd of monkeys sauntered by the window of the glassed-in office. Their heads and bodies were spray-painted gray-brown and covered with hair.

Through early November, they worked together on the movie score Jerry wrote, helping articulate the music to the pace of shots, adding tracks, adjusting details. Over and over they watched scene after scene at the video monitor by Brian's messy office desk. The score always played against the scene, tense when it was calm, conspicuously relaxed when violence was unleashed. “Jerry didn't get his Oscar nominations for nothing,” Brian said.

Jack felt bored by the process and the music. “This is pretty commercial shit,” he once told Brian.

“You don't like getting paid to write music?” Brian said.

Jack learned what was possible and what impermissible in his new job, and he began to feel the pleasure of working hard with others, making imperfect things less imperfect. Mostly, though, he felt frustration, which turned into bitterness at the trendy effects, predictable harmonies, empty rhythms, and trite tunes. Yet in three weeks, Jack had earned enough extra to pay three months' rent. Late one night in early November, he made the following entry next to the unfolding sketch of his sonata's first movement:

Nov. 7: Stayed up listening to the bitter end—Nixon wiped out McGovern. The corruption of it, with some mad scandal going on, yet the papers hardly report it. Sarah called for her parents: The Petrovs invited me for Thanksgiving. I want to ask her out, but should I? Need to talk with Janice first. At work, something odder than usual has happened, but Brian and Jerry are not saying what's going on, what disaster is occurring. In ten days, the fucking film gets an invitational showing. The Getaway, indeed. The drudgery at the studio from day to day is insane: the need to work with bits and pieces of crap, to go to the factory each day and be allowed no vision let alone freedom or control in what gets produced, not to mention the need to salve rampant egos. In the administered world, I am a low-level industrial worker, servant of the status-quo, an accomplice who transforms music—which I love as much as life—into an object of consumption, a drug to create complaisancy and consent. Brian says I have to do my time. A narrow man, he knows whereof he speaks.

* * *

The lights came on in the theater, and the screen turned white with a sheen of silver flecks. The clapping welled and then subsided. Eyes blinked against the light, as they had against the dark. Dust and rubble had billowed toward them as a blast blew open the house. Cars careened, thundering into trucks. Bullets whizzed and riddled, bursting into bodies, blood and guts splattering the earth. And at the start, gentle deer had grazed behind the barbed wire of a prison yard.

Someone nudged him to get up and make way. He stood and followed Brian into the aisle. Jostled by the crowd, he obeyed its flow into the lobby and reception hall. He was pushed into a thin, blond man with tanned skin stretched tightly over the fragile bones of his cheeks and forehead.

“Excuse me. Sorry,” Jack said.

“No problem,” he said. Jack realized it was the film's star. The taut skin and thin bones were transformed on the screen into a graced, translucent face. The co-star held his arm. Her dark eyebrows framed extraordinary, almost sunken eyes, so thin was the woman. The screen had transformed the two emaciated and handsome freaks into McQueen and McGraw.

Brian tapped Jack on the arm and handed him a glass of champagne.

“Time to zelebrate,” he said in a slur of British English. “Our fucking score will never be heard. Did you hear the shit replacing it?” He sucked intently on his pipe as they sauntered through the reception hall, invisible to the crowd of guests, money men, actors, agents, production staff. Brian and Jack were handed refills of champagne by a waiter in a white tux jacket, with the Roman profile of an aspiring actor. Jack was suddenly conscious of the jeans he wore and the rumpled crew neck sweater, his concession to the LA autumn.

“Brian, Jack,” Jerry stood at the bar and called to his assistants. A short man, clutching a beer, was standing next to him. Jerry looked hypertensive and furious; he gestured irritably for them to join him. “Sam, you know Brian. Meet Jack Weinstein. He's working with us now.”

The man with a beer was Peckinpah, the director. He wore scuffed boots and a pressed safari shirt with deep, unused pockets. “Shit, I hate previews,” he said.

“I can believe it,” Jack said. The short director looked assessingly at him, as if he were a prospect paraded before a fight promoter.

“You're a pleasant son-of-a-bitch,” Sam said in a loose, leering California drawl. “Have you ever been in a movie?”

“Jesus, no,” Jack said.

“He's an arranger. Excuse me, a ‘composer.’ From Cleveland,” Jerry said.

“Well, Jerry knows who you are, dozen' he?” He slurred his words in a parody of drunkenness. “I'll want to get in touch with this man,” he said and walked into the crowd.

“He's under a lot of pressure,” the studio composer said to Jack, and then he turned to Brian. “Do I need Sam to fuck around about him? Do I need this shit tonight, of all nights? For what? For some bright-eyed, bushy tailed kid, straight out of grad school no less?”

“He's doing great work, Jerry. You won't regret it.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Jerry said, swinging around to stare for a moment at Jack and then turning to talk with a plain woman dressed in a shower of gold, diamonds at her ears.

“Jerry likes you. It's just not a great day for him,” Brian said, puffing on his pipe.

“‘Yeah, yeah, yeah.’ Do I need this shit?” Jack said.

“I’m not kidding. Sam likes you, too.”

“Who gives a fuck,” Jack said.

“Who gives a fuck, indeed. He likes you. He never says more than two words to me. Look,” Brian pointed across the room to a man in a fashionable, oddly cut suit. He emanated energy, and people eddied around him. “That’s the mother who replaced Jerry’s score with his own, with every cliché in the book.”

Jack wanted to be driving west on Wilshire down to the Pacific.

“Which you can do if you’re the producer. Money talks, the rest of us walk,” Brian sneered in his British lisp.

“I have to go, Brian.”

“Where to?”

Outside, on Wilshire Boulevard, the sun’s glare off the facade of the silver building blinded Jack. He smelled the newly hosed concrete sidewalk of the Beverly Hills address and the exhaust from passing cars. He felt the wind rustling the dusty date palms, which swished and swayed above him toward the five stories of glass and steel. In the movie, the grazing buck and clear-eyed does had pricked their ears at a distant sound and then had lowered their heads to the wide green field. The Wilshire traffic pounded and drummed by Jack. Then the prison fence had sliced across the field of deer. Men with hopelessly alert faces were imprisoned inside the fence. Then they lowered their heads to look at nothing in particular, you pleasant son-of-a-bitch.

With a sharp, silver-handled blade, Petrov sliced through the skin into the white flesh of the turkey he stood above.

“Do you want white meat or dark, Jack?”

The young guest sat on one side of the dining table by Sarah and near Mrs. Petrov at the end. Petrov forked the steaming white meat onto the plate Jack passed him. Joseph sat on the other side, opposite his sister and Jack. The table was laden with the paraphernalia of Thanksgiving: bowls of olives (California) and cranberry sauce, candied yams, stuffing (with oysters), and pasticcio (made meatless—a Greek dish which Sarah had made, following her mother's directions: egg noodles, jack cheese, parsley, nutmeg, etc., all baked together; Sarah had made the entire meal following the ritual Helen had set for over thirty years in America but was now unable to perform).

“Why have you put oysters in the stuffing?” the small woman glanced with dark eyes at her daughter.

“I love oysters,” her husband said as finally he served himself slices of breast and thigh.

There were bottles of wine on the wide table, Riesling and Oxblood. Joseph put his hands on their necks.

“Which will it be, Jack?” He tried the Oxblood.

“Pour, please. The Oxblüt,” Petrov said, his fork piercing an oyster and bringing it to his mouth.

Joseph did not reply, only poured the dark red wine into his father's goblet. He had said nothing more than yes or no to him all evening, and no glance or word came from Joseph now as he filled the glass almost to the brim.

Sarah drank ice water, Joseph and his mother the Riesling. There was a small, crystal dish of pale caviar spread from which Jack took a spoonful. He had praised the taramasalata when they had had their drinks before dinner. Sarah brought the bowl with them to the dining table, discreetly placing it near him.

Earlier, in the music room, Joseph had sat with a glass of vodka in hand, asking how Jack liked LA and where he lived. Joseph's own apartment was in Hollywood, on Franklin near Highland, "a jog from Hollywood Bowl," he had laughed, a muted laughter which distanced him from his words, from the Bowl and Hollywood, from the room and canyon in which they talked. What struck Jack most was how ascetic the man on the couch next to him seemed, how intense his brown eyes—like his sister's and mother's only darker—how haunted he seemed despite the fine suede shirt he wore and his legs stretched out in black pants, lanky and relaxed, and the thick shock of black hair. As he chatted, there was warmth in his voice: an underground telegraph seemed to make its way through the Petrov family, that Jack was to be accepted on sight.

"Look at the credenza in back of my mother," Joseph said during dinner, pointing off-handedly at a dark, carved sideboard with doors and drawers. "It was made by her father in Greece and shipped from Athens when he died."

"My mother told me, take everything you want," Helen Petrov said, gazing in Jack's direction. "After the funeral. 'I want nothing for myself,' she said. Of course we took only a few things. But they are fine. I've often wondered why she..."

"Your father was a peasant, a mild man and a peasant, and your mother..." Petrov said, as if by rote; his words briefly interrupted the rhythm of his eating.

Helen stiffened and continued, "They are fine things, nicely carved. He was a cabinet maker." On the wood of the doors on each side of the credenza, a god's face had been carved: his forehead, cheeks, and chin were framed by leaves as if the powerful face stretched from the dark burl of the wood itself and generated a dense and gentle vegetation which flowed from him, brown and thick, toward the borders of the door.

"The crystal bowl is from our grandparents too, Mother," Joseph said, slowly pointing at the bowl near Jack.

"I suppose so," she said. She ate with one hand held in her lap.

"Joey keeps track," Sarah said and smiled at Jack.

Toward of the end of dinner, Jack asked the young pianist, "Do you travel much, to perform?"

"In January," Sarah answered for her brother, "he goes to the northwest, Portland, Eugene, Seattle. In March, he's going east."

Petrov was sitting, silent, deliberately cutting the remaining piece of turkey on his plate.

“In December, you have a concert here, no?” Jack said. “What are you playing?”

Joseph held a small fork-full of pasticcio in the air, ate, and then said, “I’m starting with the Berg Sonata and the Webern Variations.”

“I remember them; they were Schoenberg’s pupils,” Helen Petrov said, gazing pleasantly at her son and placing her knife and fork carefully on her emptied plate. Her tone was insistent, even as it coolly assumed Joseph knew what she spoke of: “They each visited us in Berlin. And of course Arnold Schoenberg visited us here in Benedict Canyon. You were a babe in arms; Sarah was three. I should say that Arnold was full of himself, but really all those people were. Except Teddy Adorno: him I liked. Didn’t he recently die, Sasha?” Petrov bridled in his seat and oddly did not reply, as if speech were suddenly dangerous for him. Helen resumed, focusing again on Joseph: “The others were pleasant enough, but ego-maniacs all. Alma Mahler and Franz Werfel, for instance. To see Alma Mahler Werfel sit here in a taffeta gown, sipping from a glass of Fūking—it was quite something. And to hear her interrupt the conversation to recite Rilke... ‘Hore, mein Herz: we must all listen to this music like the saints listen!’ Yes, the ego-maniac said ‘Saints’!”

The room was silent. It seemed as if Helen were speaking in code, and no one was willing to intercede, to try to break the code. Jack came to the rescue, zeroing in on Joseph.

“What a powerful contrast, Berg and Webern. You know about Webern’s death?” he asked.

“A terrible logic to it. That an American soldier would shoot him in Salzburg, while he was going out for a walk to smoke his pipe, in 1945.”

“And Webern had always tried to oppose the totalitarianism dominating the century. To overcome the dead-end of his culture.”

“‘To live is to defend a form,’” Joseph said with a flourish, his elbows on the table. “That was one of Webern’s favorite quotes.”

“Hölderin,” Petrov suddenly spoke up, putting down his knife and fork. “That’s Hölderin.” Joseph cringed and then held himself still, looking straight ahead between Sarah and Jack, at nothing.

“You should read *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, Joseph,” the father said, smiling and irritable at once. “You surprise me. You never speak to me so eloquently. You never speak to me at all. I can’t decide: are you a chip off the old block—the same force in you as in me? Or

some oddity, no son of mine? Though you are a pianist, aren't you?" Silence again fell over the group.

"The Schoenberg you played," Jack ventured, turning now to speak to Petrov, "two months ago, that's related to the Berg, especially the..."

"Two months ago?" Petrov said. "Impossible. It's more like two weeks."

"That was October first. Today is November twenty third. It was a great concert."

"Two months."

"How do you think he did?" Jack asked Helen Petrov, who smiled mechanically as he turned to her.

"She doesn't know," Petrov said.

"She knows," Jack said.

"I don't judge," she said.

"The newspapers said I played fine," Petrov said off-handedly, putting an end to the matter.

"Do you want me to say he played badly?" the small woman began rapidly to speak from her end of the table. "Or do you want me to proceed with the adulations? I remember Franz Werfel was very good at that: 'When a great artist touches the piano, there is something absolutely unique about it! You always know who it is! What a privilege to hear Sasha play. He is a visionary genius!' Would you like me to rave like that?"

"It looks like you've all had fine appetites," Sarah interrupted, standing and beginning to gather the plates. "You're no less than stuffed men." Then she said to Joseph and Jack, "Will you give me a hand with the dishes?" She forked the remains from each plate into a bowl, the flakes of meat and noodle, the clumps of yam and stuffing. Joseph and Jack helped her clear the table as the old couple watched.

"Relax. After, we'll have dessert," Sarah told them.

In the kitchen, she stood at the sink, her hands in suds. Joseph held a dish cloth and wiped the crystal and silver pieces. Jack was told to take a seat at the breakfast table. He watched brother and sister, one almost thirty and the other just turned thirty three, performing the ritual they had practiced on and off since youth. Their movements syncopated perfectly, Sarah handing him a bowl and Joseph leaning his lanky frame to take it, rub it dry, and place it in a row on the

old formica. Her dark gold head tilted to one side as she spoke to him or to Jack, who sat across the kitchen from them.

“We’re told to be neat and clean,” she said as she washed.

“We’re told to be good and straight,” Joseph laughed, as he dried.

“And we do it.”

“Goddamnit, we do it,” he burst out, gently lowering a silver platter to the counter.

“But do you think they did? Did they do anything they didn’t want to do?” Sarah asked, her hands in the suds and under the faucet. “Mother is one of the most spoiled, bitter, tight-assed women I’ve ever known, and we allow her to get away with it. As for father...”

“Please, Sarah.” Joseph stopped wiping. “Jack doesn’t want to hear this.” He crumpled the cloth in his hands.

“Don’t worry about me. I have parents too,” Jack said.

“Of course, she’s old now, and I do feel sorry for her. But there was a time,” she turned to Joseph and wiped her hands on his dish towel.

They brought the desserts to the dining table. There were cookies—butter-almond, dusted with powdered sugar, the one thing Helen had made that morning—and two pies, pumpkin and apple. The Petrovs were asleep in their arm chairs at each end of the table.

“Oh,” Helen said with a start, “I was just telling Sasha to get me a cup of coffee.”

As Sarah poured coffee and served slices of pie, Petrov started telling a story. It was as if he were continuing a conversation conducted in a dream while he slept, or perhaps he was answering—half an hour later—Helen’s criticisms of Schoenberg.

“I told you, Jack, that once we brought together Schoenberg and Stravinsky, here. I don’t know if Joseph and Sarah are aware of this. At one point, I remember, Igor talked about illness and creativity. ‘One half of all artists are manic-depressives,’ he said. ‘And maybe alcoholics to boot. The other half are just more subtle about what makes them sick!’

“Your parents were there that evening, and Julius spoke up then: ‘Sometimes it’s not so subtle: the stress is tremendous, with the war.’ I remember how your father leaned forward as he spoke in his chair, next to your mother. With his dark hair close cropped, very earnest, he said: ‘Not that my pain is anything compared to all the death and disaster. But there is so much anxiety everywhere, and it comes out in small odd ways, in all of us. Migraines, ulcers, heart murmurs, lumbago. It’s true. Just to play your instrument can be a challenge now.’

“Then, Thomas Mann spoke from his couch, by Katia and my friend Bruno. A cigarette was lit in Thomas’s hand, and his other hand was wedged in his suit pocket—like this—his neck stiff and erect: ‘The war takes an incalculable toll. But even before the war, my generation grew ill. And I know at least one cause. We were especially prone to the fevers and aches of romanticism, in its death throes. Even now, we keep trying to purge and cure it. We who came of age at the fin-de-siecle, who—secretly or not—loved Wagner, we were all sickly art-worshippers and symbolists in our youth!’

“‘I certainly lapped up Wagner when I was young,’ Igor said, ‘those unpleasant sounds to which all our music is indebted. When I was fifteen, in the dark of Petersburg winter days, I would sit at the piano for hours, numb from playing through Tristan and the Ring. Even Webern—Arnold, you tell them—even Webern was a Wagnerian as late as 1905. We’re all rebelling against him, still!—pulling ourselves from the grip of his autocratic rule, his iron-fisted clichés, his colonization of the chromatic scale, his imperialistic rule of music’s new terrain. Nietzsche said his greatest experience was to recover from Wagner, who was merely one of his sicknesses.’

“‘Yet,’ Thomas said, ‘music can also be the art most removed from our illness, most remote from life. Even Wagner’s music. Potentially it transcends what makes us sick.’

“Then, finally, Arnold spoke up. He had been listening from the other couch, sitting next to Alma and Franz. ‘You’re deceiving yourself,’ he said, his lips pursed and bitter. ‘Look at you, look at all of us now. We have no home here. A culture? There is no culture here. I’d just as well see America disappear than accept its compromises. My world no longer exists. Music, form itself, has vanished. My very language, my words, my tones disappear: O Wört, du Wört, das mir fehlt.’”

Petrov stopped talking then.

Neither his children nor his wife said a word. Only Jack once again interceded, with helpless wonder, pleasure, and sadness.

After dessert, Sasha and Helen went upstairs to nap, and Sarah told the two men to relax—she would join them after taking care of the dessert plates and cups.

In the music studio, Joseph lit a cigarette and opened the sliding glass door to the dark. They walked out into the cool air. The yard was palely illuminated by a half moon. It was eight o’clock Thanksgiving evening, and Los Angeles’s lights constantly blinked far below the hillside.

The endless charge and flash, the lit intersecting lines of Wilshire and Santa Monica, and the occasional pools of blackness all seemed dwarfed by the flanks of hills and the dark trees, a palm, an evergreen by the house, and a leafless pepper tree arching above the yard. The limbs hung beneath the starry sky, and fallen leaves matted the ragged lawn. The air smelled of the dusty canyon brush, the damp grass, and the acrid fragrance of the leaves.

“I wish I had some weed,” Joseph said by Jack, on the edge of the hillside. “I think there's an old stash in the garage. Come. There's something I want to show you anyway.” Jack followed him across the yard and the paved drive.

The previous Saturday, Jack had asked Sarah out—to see *The Godfather* at a Westwood Village theater. They had exited into the night; his arm held her waist, and he felt the warmth and fullness of her body. Cars filled the intersecting streets in front of the movie house, cruising Comets and Valiants, MGs, Malibus and Mercedes, the occasional limousine inching its way through the crowd. If he had walked now past the chimeras he had just seen, he wondered whether these actors—Brando, Pacino, Keaton—would look as freakish as those Friday afternoon—McQueen and McGraw. The cross-cutting of the movie's climax, baptism and murder, water and blood, still gripped him even as he ordered cokes and falafels at a stand on the corner. He brought the tray to Sarah who sat at one of the picnic tables inside the tent-like café. Through dirty plastic windows they saw a crush of movie-goers, teen-agers, UCLA students. She talked about Joseph. He was living in Hollywood near Laurel and the Hills, and he was doing drugs. “Just before you picked me up, I got a call from one of Joey's friends. Someone we know just ODeD. Jesus, Danny was twenty-nine, Joey's age.” She reached to hold Jack's hands in hers. There had been an implicit plea in her voice, as if it were possible for Jack to help her help him help himself.

Joseph opened the creaky door to the garage and flipped on the light. Sarah's Jeep was parked next to a big, white Chrysler sedan from the early sixties. Joseph disappeared into the rows of storage filling the back space.

“It's dry as dust,” he said emerging from a row he had not entered, “but it'll do.” The light bulb burned above them. There were rows of bruised trunks. Their leather, cracked and torn, bore the stamps of other countries, some with German lettering, some with Greek.

“Your parents keep all this,” Jack said. The odor of marijuana joined the smells of dust, old leather, automobiles, and leaking oil.

“Yes, it's been this way ever since I can remember,” he said. “My parents fled from Nazi Europe and plunked their shit down here in Los Angeles, the home of Aryan cults, white supremacist religions, and the John Birch Society. Brilliant planning.” He held the roach toward Jack.

“No thanks,” he said. Joseph took another drag, holding the smoke in his chest. He looked around, as if expecting the sight of other visitors, of strangers. Leaning against the piled trunks, he was a little taller than Jack, with long limbs and big, pianist's hands. His hair was unkempt, some of it covering his ears and falling toward his eyes.

“Look over here,” he said and walked to the back. A rod jutted a few feet across a corner of the garage, and over it fabric was thickly folded, a gold Byzantine brocade beneath a clear plastic cover. He turned back the plastic and lifted a fold toward Jack, who felt its dusty pile and flashing metallic threads. Joseph leaned his head and smothered his face in it.

“In here at least, you smell what shit there is to smell.”

They walked out onto the driveway, past Joseph's sports car, a low black Triumph, looking ten years old. Clouds had begun to clot the sky above the overhanging limbs. As they crossed the yard, Joseph talked about Jack's Variations.

“I found it on Father's piano. I asked him about it,” Joseph said. “He sat down right then and there to play a couple of variations, muttering all the while. He's impossible.”

“Why impossible? Difficult, I can see, but there's so much amazing life and vitality in him.”

“He's just impossible.” An affectless mask covered Joseph's face. Then he turned to Jack at the glass entrance to the music room, and a smile appeared now on his lips. “Your Variations, they're an extraordinary work. I'd love to perform them.”

* * *

The Friday after Thanksgiving, Janice knocked on Jack's door as she stood in the rain, which had begun that day sheeting in off the Pacific. She hurried in, wearing shorts and a loose, purple sweater.

“You are never home, honey. Hell, what's happened to you?”

He repeated what he had told her on the phone, going over details of how demanding his work was at UA, with Jerry and Brian. He held back any mention of the Petrovs. She stood dripping on his living room floor, and he went to get her a towel from the bathroom. When he

returned, his front door was open, and rain blew into the empty room from the paved patio which was his yard.

* * *

It rained for a week after Thanksgiving, and now tiny winged insects and small spiders in flight crawled up the screen of Petrov's music studio. The rain had driven them out of the yard and brush, and they sought the light and comparative dry of the door. The quarter-inch of glass dulled the pattering and the thud of distant thunder. Jack glanced out into the drenched dark at the evergreen jutting up next to the eaves of the house. Sarah stood near the piano, in the corner where Petrov kept his phonograph. She put on one of the records from a pile she had brought from her room; next to her records was a small camera in its case.

She sang along—about his wanting respect and her getting it—laughing and swinging her hair in back of her. She danced toward him, and the two beat movements of her hips gave a hint of bump and grind. Aretha sang from Petrov's big speaker against the wall by the Steinway. He abjured stereo. He and Mrs. Petrov were out for the evening; the brilliant violinist Michael Kramer had driven them to the home of their mutual friends the Weisbergs, to play chamber music. In the late afternoon, Sarah had called Jack and invited him over.

She grabbed his hand, and he danced with her, mimicking her motions, a smile on his face. Another song came on, and Sarah turned to peer out the glass.

“I’ve watched that fir tree grow for thirty years,” she said, her high voice filling the room. “When I was just three, they let me help plant the sapling. And when I was thirteen, I carved my initials in the trunk. The tree was just a little younger than I, but already it rose to the roof. I remember I found Joey's pocket knife to carve with—my own SP on that thick trunk. Father saw it, and he took me out by the hand. He was so angry, and all I was trying to do was put some sign, some little sign of myself on this fucking property. I remember, he held me by the wrists in his big hands. God, he held me tightly. ‘You must never, never deface our property, Sarah. Never. Promise me. Never.’”

She stared out at the fir in the rain. The limbs, black against the clouds, stretched from the tile roof out into the yard.

“When I promised, Father gave me a hug and held me almost as tightly as before. ‘My good Sarah,’ he kept saying. Mother came outside and made him let me go.”

Jack reached for her hand, which he loosely held. “This place must have meant so much to him; it was a refuge,” he said.

“Mother and father were in flight from the Nazis when they came here. In 1939. Father bought the house with money he had inherited—his mother's family kept it in a Swiss bank. The house is a classic, no? Before it was ours, it was a small-time producer's. Strang must have used this room to watch movies in. Then he moved on to a bigger monstrosity.”

At the phonograph, she changed the record and put on the song she had sung here a month ago. She picked her camera up, walked across the music room, and sat down on the couch which faced toward the sliding door.

“So here we are,” she said. “Shit, I'm thirty three and living again with my parents. When Father got sick, they needed me. And I needed help. You can't imagine what it was like, though maybe you can. Living with musicians. I had friends in the Weathermen too. So much anger and chaos, and there were the drugs. We were always high on rage or on shit. I was a mess. I didn't know how to get out. In his own way, Father came to the rescue. He had a heart attack. Now that's depressing. And nothing much has changed in three years. Mother, son, and daughter depressed out of their minds, and Father into himself.”

“Your mother seems ill. Has she been to a doctor lately?”

“Sure. The same doctor for over a decade. A brilliant internist with a practice filled with decrepit European émigrés. He couldn't care less.”

“Why not take her to someone else?”

“Father is taken by him. You should never see the respect the doctor lavishes, the fawning. Anyway, she's a hypochondriac of the old school.”

“There are small strokes she could be having. Your father too for that matter. People have them at that age. They're not dramatic, but they happen.”

“You're right,” she said. “I have to get it checked out.”

On the player sounded a son's song to a father, a plaintive wail, a call for recognition that his old man look, that he see they both were sufferers and yearners for love.

Jack walked to the wall of plaques and photographs in back of Sarah on one of the old couches. She sat still, fiddling with her camera, not turning toward him, and he looked at the framed black and white photographs hung on the frayed grass cloth.

“These are yours,” he said, and she hummed her assent in her clear soprano. Each shot had a heightened brightness and clarity, as if snapped in a highly polished mirror. One photo showed Joseph standing next to the Pacific, which swelled in the background. His face was masked by the gleam off his sunglasses. One arm was folded across his rigid body, and in the other raised hand he held a cigarette, the smoke trailing toward the camera, away from the luminous ocean.

Another frame held a photograph of Petrov and his wife, bright and precisely focused. The big man had tufts of white hair circling his head, and he stared out ironically. He wore a suit of dated, European cut, his hand held a cigar, and he stood a pace away from his gray-haired wife, short and elegant in a formal dress. Her stare moved beyond the ornate frame to envelop the room and measure what she saw.

“Don't look at those photos,” Sarah said, getting up from the couch. She walked to replace the Neil Young on the phonograph.

“They're fantastic,” Jack said. “It's wonderful they're here.”

“Father insists.” She eased the needle onto a record and stood on the oak floor in front of the single speaker by the piano. She pointed her camera in Jack's direction. Guitar distortion climbed up the scale, and Jim Morrison's voice strutted from the box.

“Here's a photograph of you. A self-portrait?”

“Yeah,” she mumbled, “from college.” In the photo, a girl of about twenty-two was wearing a tight, black sweater: Sarah stood behind a leather couch, her hand resting on it, her back to a white wall. Looking up, her lips parted, she leaned slightly over the couch; its hide was in careful focus.

“They're fantastic,” he repeated. “They...they suggest so much.” He turned to see Sarah was shooting his picture. “Oh Jesus. Now there's a record of my being here.” He walked over and sat down cross-legged by her on the oak floor.

“Let's not talk about them,” she said, putting down her camera by the records. She sat next to him and in an objective voice began complaining about Nixon's victory over McGovern and the *Times'* suppression of stories about Watergate. “You didn't vote for Nixon, did you?”

He laughed, shaking his head no. He said, “Do you remember when he first appeared on television, when we were kids? Somehow, I remember him at the piano: Ike's vice-president on

TV, tickling the ivories. Like a regular guy, the son-of-a-bitch.” Sarah laughed, and he leaned gently toward her, kissing her golden brown eyebrows, her shutting eyelids, her smiling mouth.

The room's acoustics were remarkable. Its resonant surfaces could reveal the unique timbre of any instrument played there, a violin or cello, the guitar and bass blaring by them, or the black grand which loomed above them as their hands reached to soothe and touch on the polished floor.

The speakers bellowed out a harsh and swinging lyric about the city of lights, city of los angeles, the angels, who were like titans consuming their young under the cover of night.

“Come with me,” she said in her quiet, full soprano voice. She got up and turned off the phonograph, gathering her records and camera in one arm. She switched the music studio's lights off as he followed her out.

Drawn to her, he had a vague sense that this woman merged with an elusive dream he could not yet fathom, but yearned to inhabit. He did not know what form the dream would take, and he wondered whether it were possible to realize it here, now. Whatever his destiny, he knew that the dream compelled him now to reach out to this woman, who was capable of such beauty of voice yet of such neutral silences. And he knew also that both voice and silence drew him. A bond had begun to grow, a kinship larger than he understood.

They walked to the end of the hall and up the carpeted stairs. At the top, a single fixture was on. The darkened rooms they passed were open. Sarah's one hand clutched the stack of records, and in the other she held Jack's hand, leading him down the unlit hall. An Orpheus, only led by Eurydice, he gazed into each room they floated past: Joseph's room apparently kept intact, Sasha's and Helen's room with a large, silken canopy looming over the big bed, a separate bedroom sparsely furnished, yet with its bed sheet turned down for someone to nap or sleep. At the end of the hall, Sarah led him into her room, turned on the light, and shut the door behind them.

She laid the records and camera down on a long desk built into the wall, with a typewriter, calculator, and a stereo at one end, files and drawers below, shelves above. He went up to her and began kissing her forehead and eyes; he smoothed her hair from her face and brushed his lips and tongue against her slender neck. She turned off the light, and they stood together by the bed and undid their clothes. Jack heard the incessant pinging song of the rain which poured down on the front drive, the dark, unweeded yard and path outside her window. As

their bodies touched and joined, he was conscious of the surrounding trees and hills, the citted plain, the ocean. Then, an inner time obliterated the real time of rain and night. An intensity filled them, strangely silent, nearly motionless at first, and finally their bodies began to rock together in a restless surge of motion.