

psychiatry and internal medicine. But psychiatry itself has yet to conquer the social frontiers that are patrolled by the politician. It is the nub of the community problem that the widest use of mental hygiene can be safeguarded only by the most socially disinterested sponsor; yet the politician is the man who must vote the money and he is traditionally a man whose ambition is to lower taxes and keep everybody happy. It is not the creative patience, the range of ability, or the psychiatric leadership that is wanting to make American psychiatry offer the best, perhaps the last, promise of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is the convinced support of Government, at a time when the United States is blessed with a Congress whose declared intention is 'to balance the budget', whatever imbalance of security and health this may entail.

J. F. POWERS

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

I. MORNING

'I SHOULD'VE known you'd be eating breakfast, Father. But I was at your Mass and I said to myself that must be Father Burner. Then I stayed a few minutes after Mass to make my thanksgiving.'

'Fine,' Father Burner said. 'Breakfast?'

'Had it, Father, thanking you all the same. It's the regret of my life that I can't be a daily communicant. Doctor forbids it. "Fast every day and see how long you last," he tells me. But I do make it to Mass.'

'Fine. You say you live in Father Desmond's parish?'

'Yes, Father. And sometimes I think Father Desmond does too much. All the societies to look after. Plus the Scouts and the Legion. Of course Father Kells being so elderly and all . . .'

'We're all busy these days.'

'It's the poor parish priest's day that's never done, I always say, Father, not meaning to slight the ladies, God love 'em.'

Father Burner's sausage fingers, spelling his impatience over and over, worked up sweat in the folds of the napkin which he kept in view to provoke an early departure. 'About this matter

you say Father Desmond thought I might be interested in——'
'The Plan, Father.' Mr. Tracy lifted his seersucker trousers by the creases, crossed his shining two-tone shoes, and rolled warmly forward. 'Father . . .'

Father Burner met his look briefly. He was wary of the fatherers. A backslider he could handle, it was the old story, but a red-hot believer, especially a talkative one, could be a devilish nuisance. This kind might be driven away only by prayer and fasting, and he was not adept at either.

'I guess security's one thing we're all after.'

Father Burner grunted. Mr. Tracy was too familiar to suit him. He liked his parishioners to be retiring, dumb, or frightened. There were too many references made to the priest's hard lot. Not so many poor souls as all that passed away in the wee hours, nor was there so much bad weather to brave. Mr. Tracy's heart bled for priests. That in itself was a suspicious thing in a layman. It all led up to the Plan.

'Here's the Plan, Father . . .'

 Father Burner watched his eye peel down to naked intimacy. Then, half-listening, he gazed about the room. He hated it, too. A fabulous brown rummage of encyclopedias, world globes, maps, photographs, holy pictures, mirrors, crucifixes, tropical fish, and too much furniture. The room reproduced the world, all wonders and horrors, less land than water. From the faded precipices of the walls photographs viewed each other for the most part genially across time. Three popes, successively thinner, raised hands to bless their departed painters. The world globes simpered in the shadows, heavy-headed idiot boys, listening. A bird in a blacked-out cage scratched among its offal. An anomalous buddha peeked beyond his dusty umbilicus at the trampled figures in the rug. The fish swam on, the mirrors and encyclopedias turned in upon themselves, the earless boys heard everything and understood nothing. Father Burner put his big black shoe on a moth and sent dust flecks crowding up a shaft of sunlight to the distant ceiling.

'Say you pay in \$22.67 every month, can be paid semi-annually or as you please, policy matures in twenty years and pays you \$35.50 a month for twenty years or as long as you live. That's the deal for you, Father. It beats the deal Father Desmond's got, although he's got a darned good one, and I hope he keeps it up. But we've gone ahead in the last few years, Father. Utilities are

sounder, bonds are more secure, and this new legislation protects you one hundred per cent.'

'You say Ed—Father Desmond—has the Plan?'

'Oh, indeed, Father.' Mr. Tracy had to laugh. 'I hope you don't think I'm trying to high-pressure you, Father. It's not just a piece of business with me, the Plan.'

'No?'

'No. You see, it's more or less a pet project of mine. Hardly make a cent on it. Looking out after the fathers, you might say, so they'll maybe look out after me—spiritually. I call it heavenly life insurance.'

Slightly repelled, Father Burner nodded.

'Not a few priests that I've sold the Plan to remember me at the altar daily. I guess prayer's one thing we can all use. Anyway, it's why I take a hand in putting boys through seminary.'

With that Mr. Tracy shed his shabby anonymity for Father Burner, and grew executive markings. He became the one and only Thomas Nash Tracy—T. N. T. It was impossible to read the papers and not know a few things about T. N. T. He was in small loans and insurance. His company's advertising smothered the town and country; everybody knew the slogan 'T. N. T. Spells Security.' He figured in any financial drive undertaken by the diocese, was caught by photographers in orphanages, and sat at the heavy end of the table at communion breakfasts. Hundreds of nuns, thanks to his thoughtfulness, ate capon on Christmas Day, and a few priests of the right sort received baskets of scotch. He was a B. C. L., a Big Catholic Layman, and now Father Burner could see why. Father Burner's countenance softened at this intelligence, and T. N. T. proceeded with more assurance.

'And don't call it charity, Father. Insurance, as I said, is a better name for it. I have a little money, Father, which makes it possible.' He tuned his voice down to a whisper. 'You might say I'm moderately wealthy.' He looked sharply at Father Burner, not sure of his man. 'But I'm told there isn't any crime in that.'

'I believe you need not fear for your soul on that account.'

'Glad to hear it from you, a priest, Father. Oft-times it's thrown up to me.' He came to terms with reality, smiling. 'I wasn't always so well off myself, so I can understand the temptation to knock the other fellow.'

'Fine.'

'But that's still not to say that water's not wet or that names don't hurt sometimes, whatever the bard said to the contrary.'

'What bard?'

'"Sticks and stones——".'

'Oh.'

'If this were a matter of faith and morals, Father, I'd be the one to sit back and let you do the talking. But it's a case of common sense, Father, and I think I can safely say, if you listen to me you'll not lose by it in the long run.'

'It could be.'

'May I ask you a personal question, Father?'

Father Burner searched T. N. T.'s face. 'Go ahead, Mr. Tracy.'

'Do you bank, Father?'

'*Bank*? Oh, bank—no. Why?'

'Let's admit it, Father,' T. N. T. coaxed, frankly amused. 'Priests as a class are an improvident lot—our records show it—and you're no exception. But that, I think, explains the glory of the Church down through the ages.'

'The Church is divine,' Father Burner corrected. 'And the concept of poverty isn't exactly foreign to Christianity or even to the priesthood.'

'Exactly,' T. N. T. agreed, pinked. 'But think of the future, Father.'

Nowadays when Father Burner thought of the future it required a firm act of imagination. As a seminarian twenty years ago, it had all been plain: ordination, roughly ten years as a curate somewhere (he was not the kind to be sent to Rome for further study), a church of his own to follow, the fruitful years, then retirement, pastor emeritus, with assistants doing the spade work, leaving the fine touches to him, still a hearty old man very much alive. It was not an uncommon hope and, in fact, all around him it had materialized for his friends. But for him it was only a bad memory growing worse. He was the desperate assistant now, the angry functionary ageing in the outer office. One day he would wake and find himself old, as the morning finds itself covered with snow. The future had assumed the forgotten character of a dream, so that he could not be sure that he had ever truly had one.

T. N. T. talked on and Father Burner felt a mist generating on his forehead. He tore his damp hands apart and put the napkin aside. Yes, yes, it was true a priest received miserably little, but

then that was the whole idea. He did not comment, dreading T. N. T.'s foaming compassion, to be spat upon with charity. Yes, as a matter of fact, it would be easier to face old age with something more to draw upon than what the ecclesiastical authorities deemed sufficient and would provide. Also, as T. N. T. pointed out, one never knew when he might come down with an expensive illness. T. N. T., despite himself, had something. . . . The Plan, in itself, was not bad. He must not reject the olive branch because it came by buzzard. But still Father Burner was a little bothered by the idea of a priest feathering his nest. Why? In other problems he was never the one to take the ascetic interpretation.

'You must be between thirty-five and forty, Father.'

'I'll never see forty again.'

'I'd never believe it from anyone else. You sure don't look it, Father.'

'Maybe not. But I feel it.'

'Worries, Father. And one big one is the future, Father. You'll get to be fifty, sixty, seventy—and what have you got?—not a penny saved. You look around and say to yourself—where did it go?'

T. N. T. had the trained voice of the good and faithful servant, supple from many such dealings. And still from time to time a faint draught of contempt seemed to pass through it which had something to do with his eyes. Here, Father Burner thought, was the latest thing in simony, unnecessary, inspired from without, participated in spiritlessly by the priest who must yet suffer the brunt of the blame and ultimately do the penance. Father Burner felt mysteriously purchasable. He was involved in an exchange of confidences which impoverished him mortally. In T. N. T. he sensed free will in its senility or the infinite capacity for equating evil with good—or with nothing—the same thing, only easier. Here was one more word in the history of the worm's progress, another wave on the dry flood that kept rising, the constant aggrandizement of decay. In the end it must touch the world and everything at the heart. Father Burner felt weak from a nameless loss.

'I think I can do us both a service, Father.'

'I don't say you can't.' Father Burner rose quickly. 'I'll have to think about it, Mr. Tracy.'

'To be sure, Father.' He produced a glossy circular. 'Just let me leave this literature with you.'

Father Burner, leading him to the door, prevented further talk by reading the circular. It was printed in a churchy type, all purple and gold, a dummy leaf from a medieval hymnal, and entitled, 'A Silver Lining in the Sky'. It was evidently meant for clergymen only, though not necessarily priests, as Father Burner could instantly see from its general tone.

'Very interesting,' he said.

'My business phone is right on the back, Father. But if you'd rather call me at my home some night——'

'No, thanks, Mr. Tracy.'

'Allow me to repeat, Father, this isn't just business with me.'

'I understand.' He opened the door too soon for T. N. T. 'Glad to have met you.'

'Glad to have met you, Father.'

Father Burner went back to the table. The coffee needed warming up and the butter had vanished into the toast. 'Mary,' he called. Then he heard them come gabbing into the rectory, Quinlan and his friend Keefe, also newly ordained.

They were hardly inside the dining room before he was explaining how he came to be eating breakfast so late—so late, see?—not *still*.

'You protest too much, Father,' Quinlan said. 'The Angelic Doctor himself weighed three hundred pounds, and I'll wager he didn't get it all from prayer and fasting.'

'A pituitary condition,' Keefe interjected, faltering. 'Don't you think?'

'Yah, yah, Father, you'll wager'—Father Burner, eyes malignant, leaned on his knife, the blade bowing out bright and buttery beneath his fist—'and I'll wager you'll be the first saint to reach heaven with a flannel mouth!' Rising from the table, he shook Keefe's hand, which was damp from his pocket, and experienced a surge of strength, the fat man's contempt and envy for the thin man. He thought he might break Keefe's hand off at the wrist without drawing a drop of blood.

Quinlan stood aside, six inches or more below them, gazing up, as at two impossibly heroic figures in a hotel mural. Reading the caption under them, he mused, 'Father Burner meets Father Keefe.'

'I've heard about you, Father,' Keefe said, plying him with a warmth beyond his means.

'Bound to be the case in a diocese as overstocked with magpies as this one.' Father Burner threw a fresh napkin at a plate. 'But be seated, Father Keefe.' Keefe, yes, he had seen him before, a nobody in a crowd, some affair . . . the K. C. barbecue, the Youth Centre? No, probably not, not Keefe, who was obviously not the type, too crabbed and introversive for Catholic Action. 'I suppose,' he said, 'you've heard the latest definition of Catholic Action—the interference of the laity with the inactivity of the hierarchy.'

'Very good,' Keefe said uneasily.

Quinlan yanked off his collar and churned his neck up and down to get circulation. 'Dean in the house? No? Good.' He pitched the collar at one of the candles on the buffet for a ringer. 'That turkey we met coming out the front door—think I've seen his face somewhere.'

'Thomas Nash Tracy,' Keefe said. 'I thought you knew.'

'The prominent lay priest and usurer?'

Keefe coughed. 'They say he's done a lot of good.'

Quinlan spoke to Father Burner: 'Did you take out a policy, Father?'

'One of the sixth-graders threw a rock through his windshield,' Father Burner said. 'He was very nice about it.'

'Muldoon or Ciesniewski?'

'A new kid. Public school transfer.' Father Burner patted the napkin to his chin. 'Not that I see anything wrong with insurance.'

Quinlan laughed. 'Let Walter tell you what happened to him a few days ago. Go ahead, Walter,' he said to Keefe.

'Oh, that.' Keefe fidgeted and, seemingly against his better judgement, began. 'I had a little accident—was it Wednesday it rained so? I had the misfortune to skid into a fellow parked on Fairmount. Dented his fender.' Keefe stopped and then, as though impelled by the memory of it, went on. 'The fellow came raging out of his car at me. I thought there'd be serious trouble. Then he must have seen I was a priest, the way he calmed down, I mean. I had a funny feeling it wasn't because he was a Catholic or anything like that. As a matter of fact he wore a Masonic button.' Keefe sighed. 'I guess he saw I was a priest and *ergo* . . . knew I'd have insurance.'

'Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor scrip,' Quinlan said, 'words taken from today's gospel.'

Father Burner spoke in a level tone: 'Not that I *still* see anything wrong with insurance. It's awfully easy,' he continued, hating himself for talking drivel, 'to make too much of little things.' With Quinlan around he played the conservative; among the real right-handers he was the *enfant terrible*. He operated on the principle of discord at any cost. He did not know why. It was a habit. Perhaps it had something to do with being overweight.

Arranging the Dean's chair, which had arms, for himself, Quinlan sank into it, giving Keefe the Irish whisper. 'Grace, Father.'

Keefe addressed the usual words to God concerning the gifts they were about to receive. During the prayer Father Burner stopped chewing and did not reach for anything. He noted once more that Quinlan crossed himself sloppily enough to be a monsignor.

Keefe nervously cleared the entire length of his throat. 'It's a beautiful church you have here at Saint Patrick's, Father.' A lukewarm light appeared in his eyes, flickered, sputtered out, leaving them blank and blue. His endless fingers felt for his receding chin in the onslaught of silence.

'I have?' Father Burner turned his spoon abasingly to his bosom. 'Me?' He jabbed at the grapefruit before him, his second, demolishing its perfect rose window. 'I don't know why it is the Irish without exception are always laying personal claim to church property. The Dean is forever saying *my* church, *my* school, *my* furnace . . .'

'I'm sorry, Father,' Keefe said, flushing. 'And I'll confess I did think he virtually built Saint Patrick's.'

'Out of the slime of the earth, I know. A common error.' With sudden, unabated displeasure Father Burner recalled how the Dean, one of the last of the old brick and mortar pastors, had built the church, school, sisters' house, and rectory, and had named the whole thing through the lavish pretence of a popular contest. Opposed bitterly by Polish, German, and Italian minorities, he had effected a compromise between their bad taste (Saint Stanislaus, Saint Boniface, Saint Anthony) and his own better judgement in the choice of Saint Patrick's.

Quinlan, snorting, blurted, 'Well, he did build it, didn't he?'

Father Burner smiled at them from the other world. 'Only, if you please, in a manner of speaking.'

'True,' Keefe murmured humbly.

'Nuts,' Quinlan said. 'It's hard for me to see God in a few buildings paid for by the funds of the faithful and put up by a mick contractor. A burning bush, yes.'

Father Burner, lips parched to speak an unsummonable cruelty, settled for a smouldering aside to the kitchen. 'Mary, more eggs here.'

A stuffed moose of a woman with a tabby-cat face charged in on swollen feet. She stood wavering in shoes sliced fiercely for corns. With the back of her hand she wiped some cream from the fuzz ringing her baby-pink mouth. Her hair poked through a broken net like stunted antlers. Father Burner pointed to the empty platter.

'Eggs,' he said.

'Eggs!' she cried, tumbling her eyes like great blue dice among them. She seized up the platter and carried it whirling with grease into the kitchen.

Father Burner put aside the grapefruit. He smiled and spoke calmly. 'I'll have to let the Dean know, Father, how much you like *his* plant.'

'Do, Father. A beautiful church . . . "a poem in stone"—was it Ruskin?'

'Ruskin? *Stones of Venice*,' Father Burner grumbled. '*Sesame and Lilies*, I know . . . but I never cared for his *style*.' He passed the knife lovingly over the pancakes on his plate and watched the butter bubble at the pores. 'So much sweetness, so much light, I'm afraid, made Jack a dull boy.'

Quinlan slapped all his pockets. 'Pencil and paper, quick!'

'And yet . . .' Keefe cocked his long head, brow fretted, and complained to his upturned hands. 'Don't understand how he stayed outside the Church.' He glanced up hopefully. 'I wonder if Chesterton gives us a clue.'

Father Burner, deaf to such precious speculation, said, 'In the nineteenth century Francis Thompson was the only limey worth his salt. It's true.' He quartered the pancakes. 'Of course, Newman.'

'Hopkins has some good things.'

'Good—yes, if you like jabberwocky and jebbies! I don't care for either.' He dispatched a look of indictment at Quinlan.

'What a pity,' Quinlan murmured, 'Oliver Wendell couldn't be at table this morning.'

'No, Father, you can have your Hopkins, you and Father Quinlan here. Include me out, as Sam Goldwyn says. Poetry—I'll take my poetry the way I take my liquor, neat.'

Mary brought in the platter oozing with bacon and eggs.

'Good for you, Mary,' Quinlan said. 'I'll pray for you.'

'Thank you, Father,' Mary said.

Quinlan dipped the platter with a trace of obeisance to Father Burner.

'No, thanks.'

Quinlan scooped up the coffeepot in a fearsome rush and held it high at Father Burner, his arm so a-tremble the lid rattled dangerously. 'Sure and will you be about having a sup of coffee now, Father?'

'Not now. And do you mind not playing the wild Irish wit so early in the day, Father?'

'That I don't. *But a relentless fate pursuing good Father Quinlan, he was thrown in among hardened clerics where but for the grace of God that saintly priest, so little understood, so much maligned . . .*' Quinlan poured two cups and passed one to Keefe. 'For yourself, Father.'

Father Burner nudged the toast to Keefe. 'Father Quinlan, that saintly priest, models his life after the Rover Boys, particularly Sam, the fun-loving one.'

Quinlan dealt himself a mighty *mea culpa*.

Father Burner grimaced, the flesh rising in sweet, concentric tiers around his mouth, and said in a tone both entrusting and ennobling Keefe with his confidence, 'The syrup, if you please, Father'. Keefe passed the silver pitcher which was running at the mouth. Father Burner reimmersed the doughy remains on his plate until the butter began to float around the edges as in a moat. He felt them both watching the butter. Regretting that he had not foreseen this attraction, he cast about in his mind for something to divert them and found the morning sun coming in too strongly. He got up and pulled down the shade. He returned to his place and settled himself in such a way that a new chapter was indicated. 'Don't believe I know where you're located, Father.'

'Saint Jerome's,' Keefe said. 'Monsignor Fiedler's.'

'One of those P. N. places, eh? Is the boss sorry he ever started it? I know some of them are.'

Keefe's lips popped apart. 'I don't quite understand.'

Quinlan prompted: 'P. N.—Perpetual Novena.'

'Oh, I never heard him say.'

'You wouldn't, of course. But I know a lot of them that are.' Father Burner stuck a morsel on his fork and swirled it against the tide of syrup. 'It's a real problem all right. I was all out for a P. N. here during the depression. Thought it might help. The Dean was against it.'

'I can tell you this,' Keefe said. 'Attendance was down from what it used to be until the casualties began to come in. Now it's going up.'

'I was just going to say the war ought to take the place of the depression.' Father Burner fell silent. 'Terrible thing, war. Hard to know what to do about it. I tried to sell the Dean the idea of a victory altar. You've seen them. Vigil lights—'

'At a dollar a throw,' Quinlan said.

'Vigil lights in the form of a V, names of the men in the service and all that. But even that, I guess— Well, like I said, I tried . . .'

'Yes, it is hard,' Keefe said.

'God, the Home, and the Flag,' Quinlan said. 'The poets don't make the wars.'

Father Burner ignored that. 'Lately, though, I can't say how I feel about P. N.'s. Admit I'm not so strong for them as I was once. Ought to be some way of terminating them, you know, but then they wouldn't be perpetual, would they?'

'No, they wouldn't,' Keefe said.

'Not so perpetual,' Quinlan said.

'Of course,' Father Burner continued, 'the term itself, perpetual novena, is preposterous, a solecism. Possibly dispensation lies in that direction. I'm not theologian enough to say. Fortunately it's not a problem we have to decide.' He laid his knife and fork across the plate. 'Many are the consolations of the lowly curate. No decisions, no money worries.'

'We still have to count the sugar,' Quinlan said. 'And put up the card tables.'

'Reminds me,' Father Burner said earnestly. 'Father Desmond at Assumption was telling me they've got a new machine does all that.'

'Puts up card tables?' Quinlan inquired.

'Counts the collection, wraps the silver,' Father Burner explained, 'so it's all ready for the bank. Mean to mention it to the Dean, if I can catch him right.'

'I'm afraid, Father, he knows about it already.'

Father Burner regarded Quinlan sceptically. 'Does? I suppose he's against it.'

'I heard him tell the salesman that's what he had his assistants for.'

'Assistant, Father, not assistants. You count the collection, not me. I was only thinking of you.'

'I was only quoting him. Father. [Sic.] Sorry.'

'Not at all. I haven't forgotten the days I had to do it. It's a job has to be done and nothing to be ashamed of. Wouldn't you say, Father Keefe?'

'I dare say that's true.'

Quinlan, with Father Burner still molesting him with his eyes, poured out a glass of water and drank it all. 'I still think we could do with a lot less calculating. I notice the only time we get rid of the parish paper is when the new lists are published—the official standings. Of course it's a lousy sheet anyway.'

Father Burner, as editor of the paper, replied: 'Yes, yes, Father. We all know how easy it is to be wrathful or fastidious about these things—or whatever the hell it is you are. And we all know there *are* abuses. But contributing to the support of the Church is still one of her commandments.'

'Peace, Père,' Quinlan said.

'Figures don't lie.'

'Somebody was telling me just last night that figures do lie. He looked a lot like you.'

Father Burner found his cigarettes and shuffled a couple half out of the pack. He eyed Quinlan and the cigarettes as though it were as simple to discipline the one as to smoke the others. 'For some reason, Father, you're damned fond of those particular figures.'

Keefe stirred. 'Which particular figures, Fathers?'

'It's the figures put out by the Cardinal of Toledo on how many made their Easter duty last year.' Father Burner offered Keefe a cigarette. 'I discussed the whole thing with Father Quinlan last night. It's his latest thesis. Have a cigarette?'

'No, thanks,' Keefe said.

'So you don't smoke?' Father Burner looked from Keefe to

Quinlan, blacklisting them together. He held the cigarette hesitantly at his lips. 'It's all right, isn't it?' He laughed and touched off the match with his thumbnail.

'His Eminence,' Quinlan said, 'reports only fifteen per cent of the women and five per cent of the men made their Easter duty last year.'

'So that's only three times as many women as men,' Father Burner said with buried gaiety. 'Certainly to be expected in any Latin country.'

'But fifteen per cent, Father! And five per cent! Just think of it!' Keefe glanced up at the ceiling and at the souvenir plates on the moulding, as though to see inscribed along with scenes from the Columbian Exposition the day and hour the end of the world would begin. He finally stared deep into the goldfish tank in the window.

Father Burner ploughed up the silence, talking with a mouthful of smoke. 'All right, all right, I'll say what I said in the first place. There's something wrong with the figures. A country as overwhelmingly Catholic as Spain!' He sniffed, pursed his lips, and said, 'Pooh!'

'Yes,' Keefe said, still baulking. 'But it is disturbing, Father Burner.'

'Sure it's disturbing, Father Keefe. *Lots of things are.*'

A big, faded goldfish paused to stare through the glass at them and then with a single lob of its tail slipped into a dark green corner.

Quinlan said, 'Father Burner belongs to the school that's always seeing a great renascence of faith in the offing. The hour before dawn and all that. Tell it to Rotary on Tuesday, Father.'

Father Burner countered with a frosty pink smile. 'What would I ever do without you, Father? If you're trying to say I'm a dreadful optimist, you're right and I don't mind at all. I am—and proud of it!'

Ascending to his feet, he went to the right side of the buffet, took down the card index to parishioners, and returned with it to his place. He pushed his dishes aside and began to sort out the deadheads to be called on personally by him or Quinlan. The Dean, like all pastors, he reflected, left the dirty work to the assistants. 'Why doesn't he pull them,' he snapped, tearing up a card, 'when they kick off! Can't very well forward them to the next world. Say, how many Gradys live at 909 South Vine?

Here's Anna, Catherine, Clement, Gerald, Harvey, James A., James F.—which James is the one they call "Bum"?"

'James F.,' Quinlan said. 'Can't you tell from the take? The other James works.'

'John, Margaret, Matthew—that's ten, no eleven. Here's Dennis out of place. Patrick, Rita and William—fourteen of them, no birth control there, and they all give. Except Bum. Nice account otherwise. Can't we find Bum a job? What's it with him, drink?'

Now he came to Maple Street. These cards were the remains of little Father Vicci's work among the magdalens. Ann Mason, Estelle Rogers, May Miller, Billie Starr. The names had the generic ring. Great givers when they gave—Christmas, \$25; Easter, \$20; Propagation of the Faith, \$10; Catholic University, \$10—but not much since Father Vicci was exiled to the sticks. He put Maple Street aside for a thorough sifting.

The doorbell rang. Father Burner leaned around in his chair. 'Mary.' The doorbell rang again. Father Burner bellowed. 'Mary!'

Quinlan pushed his chair away from the table. 'I'll get it.'

Father Burner blocked him. 'Oh, I'll get it! Hell of a bell! Why does he have a bell like that!' Father Burner opened the door to a middle-aged woman whose name he had forgotten or never known. 'Good morning,' he said. 'Will you step in?'

She stayed where she was and said, 'Father, it's about the servicemen's flag in church. My son Stanley—you know him—'

Father Burner, who did not know him, half nodded. 'Yes, how is Stanley?' He gazed over her shoulder at the lawn, at the dandelions turning into poppies before his eyes.

'You know he was drafted last October, Father, and I been watching that flag you got in church ever since, and it's still the same, five hundred thirty-six stars. I thought you said you put a star up for all them that's gone in the service, Father.'

Now the poppies were dandelions again. He could afford to be firm with her. 'We can't spend all our time putting up stars. Sometimes we fall behind. Besides, a lot of the boys are being discharged.'

'You mean there's just as many going in as coming out, so you don't have to change the flag?'

'Something like that.'

'I see.' He was sorry for her. They had run out of stars. He had tried to get the Dean to order some more, had even offered . . .

and the Dean had said they could use up the gold ones first. When Father Burner had objected, telling him what it would mean, he had suggested that Father Burner apply for the curatorship of the armoury.

'The pastor will be glad to explain how it works the next time you see him.'

'Well, Father, if that's the way it is . . .' She was fading down the steps. 'I just thought I'd ask.'

'That's right. There's no harm in asking. How's Stanley?'

'Fine, and thank you, Father, for your trouble.'

'No trouble.'

When he came back to the table they were talking about the junior clergyman's examinations which they would take for the first time next week. Father Burner interrupted, 'The Dean conducts the history end of it, you know.'

'I say!' Keefe said. 'Any idea what we can expect?'

'You have nothing to fear. Nothing.'

'Really?'

'Really. Last year, I remember, there were five questions and the last four depended on the first. So it was really only one question—if you knew it. I imagine you would've.' He paused, making Keefe ask for it.

'Perhaps you can recall the question, Father?'

'Perfectly, Father. "What event in the American history of the Church took place in 1541?"' Father Burner, slumping in his chair, smirked at Keefe pondering for likely martyrs and church legislation. He imagined him skipping among the tomes and statuary of his mind, winnowing dates and little known facts like mad, only at last to emerge dusty and downcast. Father Burner sat up with a jerk and assaulted the table with the flat of his hand. 'Time's up. Answer: "De Soto sailed up the Mississippi."'

Quinlan snorted. Keefe sat very still, incredulous, silent, utterly unable to digest the answer, finally croaking, 'How odd'. Father Burner saw in him the boy whose marks in school had always been a consolation to his parents.

'So you don't have to worry, Father. No sense in preparing for it. Take in a couple of movies instead. And cheer up! The Dean's been examining the junior clergy for twenty-five years and nobody ever passed history yet. You wouldn't want to be the first one.'

Father Burner said grace and made the sign of the cross with slow distinction. 'And, Father,' he said, standing, extending his hand to Keefe, who also rose, 'I'm glad to have met you'. He withdrew his hand before Keefe was through with it and stood against the table knocking toast crumbs on to his plate. 'Ever play any golf? No? Well, come and see us for conversation then. You don't have anything against talking, do you?'

'Well, of course, Father, I . . .'

Father Burner gave Keefe's arm a rousing clutch. 'Do that!'

'I will, Father. It's been a pleasure.'

'Speaking of pleasure,' Father Burner said, tossing Quinlan a stack of cards, 'I've picked out a few lost sheep for you to see on Maple Street, Father.'

II. NOON

He hung his best black trousers on a hanger in the closet and took down another pair, also black. He tossed them out behind him and they fell patched at the cuffs and baggy across his unmade bed. His old suède jacket, following, slid dumpily to the floor. He stood gaping in his clerical vest and undershorts, knees knocking and pimply, thinking . . . what else? His aviator's helmet. He felt all the hooks blindly in the darkness. It was not there. 'Oh, hell!' he groaned, sinking to his knees. He pawed among the old shoes and boxes, and wrapping paper and string that he was always going to need. Under his golf bag he found it. So Mary had cleaned yesterday.

There was also a golf ball unknown to him, a Royal Bomber, with one small hickey in it. Father Desmond, he remembered, had received a box of Royal Bombers from a thoughtful parishioner. He stuck the helmet on his balding head to get it out of the way and took the putter from the bag. He dropped the ball at the door of the closet. Taking his own eccentric stance—a perversion of what the pro recommended and a dozen books on the subject—he putted the ball across the room at a dirty collar lying against the bookcase. A thready place in the carpet caused the ball to jump the collar and to loose a pamphlet from the top of the bookcase. He restored the pamphlet—Pius XI on 'Atheistic Communism'—and poked the ball back to the door of the closet. Then, allowing for the carpet, he drove the ball straight, *click*, through the collar, *clop*. Still had his old putting eye. And his irons had always been

steady if not exactly crashing. It was his woods, the tee shots, that ruined his game. He'd give a lot to be able to hit his woods properly, not to dub his drives, if only on the first tee—where there was always a crowd (mixed).

At one time or another he had played every hole at the country club in par or less. Put all those pars and birdies together, adding in the only two eagles he'd ever had, and you had the winning round in the state open, write-ups and action shots in the papers—photo shows Rev. Ernest 'Boomer' Burner, par-shattering padre, blasting out of a trap. He needed only practice perhaps and at his earliest opportunity he would entice some of the eighth-grade boys over into the park to shag balls. He sank one more for good measure, winning a buck from Ed Desmond who would have bet against it, and put the club away.

Crossing the room for his trousers he noticed himself in the mirror with the helmet on and got a mild surprise. He scratched a little hair down from underneath the helmet to offset the egg effect. He searched his eyes in the mirror for a sign of ill health. He walked away from the mirror, as though done with it, only to wheel sharply so as to see himself as others saw him, front and profile, not wanting to catch his eye, just to see himself. . . .

Out of the top drawer of the dresser he drew a clean white silk handkerchief and wiped the shine from his nose. He chased his eyes over into the corner of the mirror and saw nothing. Then, succumbing to his original intention, he knotted the handkerchief at the crown of the helmet and completed the transformation of time and place and person by humming, vibrato, 'Jeannine, I dream in lilac time,' remembering the old movie. He saw himself over his shoulder in the mirror, a sad war ace. It reminded him that his name was not Burner, but Boerner, an impediment removed at the outset of the First World War by his father. In a way he resented the old man for it. They had laughed at the seminary; the war, except as theory, hardly entered there. In perverse homage to the old Boerner, to which he now affixed a proud 'von', he dropped the fair-minded American look he had and faced the mirror sneering, scar-cheeked, and black of heart, the flying Junker who might have been. 'Himmelkreuzdonnerwetter! When you hear the word "culture",' he snarled, hearing it come back to him in German, 'reach for your revolver!'

Reluctantly he pulled on his black trousers, falling across the bed to do so, as though felled, legs heaving up like howitzers.

He lay still for a moment, panting, and then let the innerspring mattress bounce him to his feet, a fighter coming off the ropes. He stood looking out the window, buckling his belt, and then down at the buckle, chins kneading softly with the effort, and was pleased to see that he was holding his own on the belt, still a good half-inch away from last winter's high-water mark.

At the sound of high heels approaching on the front walk below, he turned firmly away from the window and considered for the first time since he posted it on the wall the prayer for priests sent him by a candle concern. 'Remember, O most compassionate God, that they are but weak and frail human beings. Stir up in them the grace of their vocation which is in them by the position of the Bishops' hands. Keep them close to Thee, lest the enemy prevail against them, so that they may never do anything in the slightest degree unworthy of their sublime. . . .' His eyes raced through the prayer and out of the window. . . .

He was suddenly inspired to write another letter to the Archbishop. He sat down at his desk, slipped a piece of paper into his portable, dated it with the saint's day it was, and wrote, 'Your Excellency: Thinking my letter of some months ago may have gone amiss, or perhaps due to the press of business——' He ripped the paper from the portable and typed the same thing on a fresh sheet until he came to 'business', using instead 'affairs of the Church'. He went on to signify—it was considered all right to 'signify', but to re-signify?—that he was still of the humble opinion that he needed a change of location and had decided, since he believed himself ready for a parish of his own, a rural one might be best, all things considered (by which he meant easier to get). He, unlike some priests of urban upbringing and experience, would have no objection to the country. He begged to be graced with an early reply. That line, for all its seeming docility, was full of dynamite and ought to break the episcopal silence into which the first letter had dissolved. This was a much stronger job. He thought it better for two reasons: the Archbishop was supposed to like outspoken people, or, that being only more propaganda talked up by the sycophants, then it ought to bring a reply which would reveal once and for all his prospects. Long overdue for the routine promotion, he had a just cause. He addressed the letter

and placed it in his coat. He went to the bathroom. When he came back he put on the coat, picked up the suede jacket and helmet, looked around for something he might have forgot, a book of chances, a box of Sunday envelopes to be delivered, some copy for the printer, but there was nothing. He lit a cigarette at the door and not caring to throw the match on the floor or look for the ashtray, which was out of sight again, he dropped it in the empty holy-water font.

Downstairs he paused at the telephone in the hall, scribbled 'Airport' on the message pad, thought of crossing it out or tearing off the page, but since it was dated he let it stand and added 'Visiting the sick', signing his initials, E. B.

He went through the wicker basket for mail. A card from the Book-of-the-Month Club. So it was going to be another war book selection this month. Well, they knew what they could do with it. He wished the Club would wake up and select some dandies, as they had in the past. He thought of *Studs Lonigan*—there was a book, the best thing since the Bible.

An oblique curve in the road: perfect, wheels parallel with the centre line. So many drivers took a curve like that way over on the other fellow's side. Father Burner touched the lighter on the dashboard to his cigarette and plunged his hands deeper into the cushions. A cloud of smoke whirled about the little Saint Christopher garotted from the ceiling. Father Burner tugged viciously at both knees, loosening the binding black cloth, easing the seat. Now that he was in open country he wanted to enjoy the scenery—God's majesty. How about a sermon that would liken the things in the landscape to the people in a church? All different, all the same, the handiwork of God. Moral: it is right and meet for rocks to be rocks, trees to be trees, pigs to be pigs, but—and here the small gesture that says so much—what did that mean that men, created in the image and likeness of God, should be? And what—He thrust the sermon out of mind, tired of it. He relaxed, as before an open fireplace, the weight of dogma off his shoulders. Then he grabbed at his knees again, cursing. Did the tailor skimp on the cloth because of the ecclesiastical discount?

A billboard inquired: 'Pimples?' Yes, he had a few, but he blamed them on the climate, the humidity. Awfully hard for a priest to transfer out of a diocese. He remembered the plan he had

never gone through with. Would it work after all? Would another doctor recommend a change? Why? He would only want to know why, like the last bastard. Just a slight case of obesity, Reverend. Knew he was a non-Catholic when he said Reverend. Couldn't trust a Catholic one. Some of them were thicker than thieves with the clergy. Wouldn't want to be known as a malingerer, along with everything else.

Another billboard: 'Need Cash? See T. N. T.'

Rain. He knew it. No flying for him today. One more day between him and a pilot's licence. Thirteen hours yet and it might have been twelve. Raining so, and with no flying, the world seemed to him . . . a valley of tears. He would drive on past the airport for a hamburger. If he had known, he would have brought along one of the eighth-grade boys. They were always bragging among themselves about how many he had bought them, keeping score. One of them, the Cannon kid, had got too serious from the hamburgers. When he said he was 'contemplating the priesthood' Father Burner, wanting to spare him the terrible thing a false vocation could be, had told him to take up aviation instead. He could not forget the boy's reply: *But couldn't I be a priest like you, Father?*

On the other hand, he was glad to be out driving alone. Never had got the bang out of playing with the kids a priest in this country was supposed to. The failure of the Tom Playfair tradition. He hated most sports. Ed Desmond was a sight at a ball game. Running up and down the base lines, giving the umpires hell, busting all the buttons off his cassock. Assumption rectory smelled like a locker room from all the equipment. Poor Ed.

The rain drummed on the engine hood. The windshield wiper sliced back and forth, reminding him a little of a guillotine. Yes, if he had to, he would die for the Faith.

From here to the hamburger place it was asphalt and slicker than concrete. Careful. Slick. Asphalt. Remembered . . . Quinlan coming into his room one afternoon last winter when it was snowing—the idiot—prating:

*Here were decent godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls . . .*

That was Quinlan for you, always spouting against the status quo without having anything better to offer. Told him that. Told him

golfers, funny as it might seem to some people, have souls and who's to save them? John Bosco worked wonders in taverns, which was not to say Father Burner thought he was a saint, but rather only that he was not too proud to meet souls halfway wherever it might be, in the confessional or on the fairways. Saint Ernest Burner, Help of Golfers, Pray for Us! (Quinlan's come-back.) Quinlan gave him a pain. Keefe, now that he knew what he was like, ditto. Non-smokers. Jansenists. First fervour is false fervour. They would cool. He would not judge them, however.

He slowed down and executed a sweeping turn into the parking lot reserved for patrons of the hamburger. He honked his horn his way, three shorts and a long—victory. She would see his car or know his honk and bring out two hamburgers, medium well, onions, pickle, relish, tomato, catsup—his way.

She came out now, carrying an umbrella, holding it ostensibly more over the hamburgers than herself. He took the tray from her. She waited dumbly, her eyes at a level with his collar.

'What's to drink?'

'We got pop, milk, coffee . . .' Here she faltered, as he knew she would; washing her hands of what recurrent revelation, rather than experience, told her was to follow.

'A nice cold bottle of beer.' Delivered of the fatal words, Father Burner bit into the smoking hamburger. The woman turned sorrowfully away. He put her down again for native Protestant stock.

When she returned, sheltering the bottle under the umbrella, Father Burner had to smile at her not letting pious scruples interfere with business, another fruit of the so-called Reformation. Watch that smile, he warned himself, or she'll take it for carnal. He received the bottle from her hands. For all his familiarity with the type, he was uneasy. Her lowered eyes informed him of his guilt.

Was he immoderate? Who on earth could say? *In dubiis libertas*, not? He recalled his first church supper at Saint Patrick's, a mother bringing her child to the Dean's table. She's going to be confirmed next month, Monsignor. Indeed? Then tell me, young lady, what are the seven capital sins? Pride, Covetousness . . . Lust, Anger. Uh. The child's mother, one of those tough Irish females built like a robin, worried to death, lips silently forming the other sins

for her daughter. Go ahead, dear. Envy. Proceed, child. Yes, Monsignor. Uh . . . Sloth. To be sure. That's six. One more. And . . . uh. Fear of the Lord, perhaps? Meekness? Hey, Monsignor, ain't them the Divine Counsels! The Dean, smiling, looking at Father Burner's plate, covered with chicken bones, at his stomach, fighting the vest, and for a second into the child's eyes, slipping her the seventh sin. *Gluttony*, Monsignor! The Dean gave her a coin for her trouble and she stood awkwardly in front of Father Burner, lingering, twisting her gaze from his plate to his stomach, to his eyes, finally quacking, Oh Fawther!

Now he began to brood upon his failure as a priest. There was no sense in applying the consolations of an anchorite to himself. He wanted to know one thing: when would he get a parish? When would he make the great metamorphosis from assistant to pastor, from mouse to rat, as the saying went? He was forty-three, four times transferred, seventeen years an ordained priest, a curate yet and only. He was the only one of his class still without a parish. The only one . . . and in his pocket, three days unopened, was another letter from his mother, kept waiting all these years, who was to have been his housekeeper. He could not bear to warm up her expectations again.

Be a chaplain? That would take him away from it all and there was the possibility of meeting a remote and glorious death carrying the Holy Eucharist to a dying soldier. It would take something like that to make him come out even, but then that, too, he knew in a corner of his heart, would be only exterior justification for him, a last bid for public approbation, a short cut to nothing. And the chaplain's job, it was whispered, could be an ordeal both ignominious and tragic. It would be just his luck to draw an assignment in a rehabilitation centre, racking pool balls and repairing ping-pong bats for the boys—the apostolic game-room attendant and toastmaster. Sure, Sarge, I'll lay you even money the Sox make it three straight in Philly and spot you a run a game to boot. You win, I lose a carton of Chesters—I win, you go to Mass every day for a week! Hard-headed holiness. . . .

There was the painful matter of the appointment to Saint Patrick's. The Dean, an irremovable pastor, and the Archbishop had argued over funds and the cemetery association. And the Archbishop, losing though he won, took his revenge, it was

rumoured, by appointing Father Burner as the Dean's assistant. It was their second encounter. In the first days of his succession, the Archbishop heard that the Dean always said a green Mass on Saint Patrick's Day, thus setting the rubrics at naught. Furious, he summoned the Dean into his presence, but stymied by the total strangeness of him and his great age, he had talked of something else. The Dean took a different view of his narrow escape, which is what the chancery office gossips called it, and now every year, on repeating the error, he would say to the uneasy nuns, 'Sure and nobody ever crashed the gates of hell for the wearing of the green'. (Otherwise it was not often he did something to delight the hearts of the professional Irish.)

In the Dean's presence Father Burner often had the sensation of confusion, a feeling that someone besides them stood listening in the room. To free himself he would say things he neither meant nor believed. The Dean would take the other side and then . . . there they were again. The Dean's position in these bouts was roughly that of the old saints famous for their faculty of smelling sins and Father Burner played the role of the one smelled. It was no contest. If the Archbishop could find no words for the Dean there was nothing he might do. He might continue to peck away at a few stray foibles behind the Dean's back. He might point out how familiar the Dean was with the Protestant clergy about town. He did. It suited his occasional orthodoxy (reserved mostly to confound his critics and others much worse, like Quinlan, whom he suspected of having him under observation for humorous purposes) to disapprove of all such questionable ties, as though the Dean were entertaining heresy, or at least felt kindly toward this new 'interfaith' nonsense so dear to the reformed Jews and fresh-water sects. It was very small game, however. And the merest brush with the Dean might bring any one of a hundred embarrassing occasions back to life, and it was easy for him to burn all over again.

When he got his darkroom rigged up in the rectory the Dean had come snooping around and inquired without staying for an answer if the making of tin-types demanded that a man shun the light to the extent Father Burner appeared to. Now and again, hearkening back to this episode, the Dean referred to him as the Prince of Darkness. It did not end there. The title caught on all over the diocese. It was not the only one he had.

In reviewing a new historical work for a national Catholic magazine, he had attempted to get back at two Jesuits he knew in town, calling attention to certain tendencies—he meant nothing so gross as ‘order pride’—which, if not necessarily characteristic of any religious congregation within the Church, were still too often to be seen in any long view of history (which the book at hand did not pretend to take), and whereas the secular clergy, *per se*, had much to answer for, was it not true, though certainly not through any superior virtue, nor even as a consequence of their secularity—indeed, he would be a fool to dream that such orders as those founded, for instance, by Saint Benedict, Saint Francis, and Saint Dominic (Saint Ignatius was not instanced) were without their places in the heart of the Church, even today, when perhaps . . .

Anyway ‘secular’ turned up once as ‘circular’ in the review. The local Jesuits, writing in to the magazine as a group of innocent bystanders, made many subtle plays upon the unfortunate ‘circular’ and its possible application to the person of the reviewer (their absolute unfamiliarity with the reviewer, they explained, enabled them to indulge in such conceivably dangerous whimsey). But the direction of his utterances, they thought, seemed clear, and they regretted more than they could say that the editors of an otherwise distinguished journal had found space for them, especially in wartime, or perhaps they did not rightly comprehend the course—was it something new?—set upon by the editors and if so . . .

So Father Burner was also known as ‘the circular priest’ and he had not reviewed anything since for that magazine.

The mark of the true priest was heavy on the Dean. The mark was on Quinlan; it was on Keefe. It was on every priest he could think of, including a few on the bum, and his good friend and bad companion, Father Desmond. But it was not on him, not properly. They, the others, were stained with it beyond all disguise or disfigurement—indelibly, as indeed Holy Orders by its sacramental nature must stain, for keeps in this world and the one to come. ‘Thou art a priest for ever.’ With him, however, it was something else and less, a mask or badge which he could and did remove at will, a temporal part to be played, almost only a doctor’s or lawyer’s. They, the others, would be lost in any persecution. The mark would doom them. But he, if that *dies irae* ever came—and

it was every plump seminarian's apple-cheeked dream—could pass as the most harmless and useful of humans, a mail-man, a bus rider, a husband. But would he? No. They would see. I, he would say, appearing unsought before the judging rabble, am a priest, of the order of Melchizedech. Take me. I am ready. *Deo gratias.*

Father Burner got out the money to pay and honked his horn. The woman, coming for the bottle and tray, took his money without acknowledging the tip. She stood aside, the bottle held gingerly between offended fingers, final illustration of her lambishness, and watched him drive away. Father Burner, applying a cloven foot to the pedal, gave it the gas. He sensed the woman hoping in her simple heart to see him wreck the car and meet instant death in an unpostponed act of God.

Under the steady influence of his stomach thrust against the wheel, the car proceeded while he searched himself for a cigarette. He passed a hitch-hiker, saw him fade out of view in the mirror overhead, gesticulate wetly in the distance. Was the son of a gun thumbing his nose? Anticlericalism. But pray that your flight be not in the winter . . . No, wrong text: he would not run away.

The road skirted a tourist village. He wondered who stayed in those places and seemed to remember a story in one of the religious scandal sheets . . . *ILLCIT LOVE* in steaming red type.

A billboard cried out, 'Get in the scrap and—get in the scrap!' Some of this advertising, he thought, was pretty slick. Put out probably by big New York and Chicago agencies with crack men on their staffs, fellows who had studied at *Time*. How would it be to write advertising? He knew a few things about layout and type faces from editing the parish paper. He had read somewhere about the best men of our time being in advertising, the air corps of business. There was room for better taste in the Catholic magazines, for someone with a name in the secular field to step in and drive out the money-changers with their trusses, corn cures, non-tangle rosary beads, and crosses that glow in the dark. It was a thought.

Coming into the city limits, he glanced at his watch, but neglected to notice the time. The new gold strap got his eye. The watch itself, a priceless pyx, held the hour (time is money) sacred, like a host. He had chosen it for an ordination gift rather than the

usual chalice. It took the kind of courage he had to go against the grain there.

'I'm a dirty stinker!' Father Desmond flung his arms out hard against the mattress. His fists opened on the sheet, hungry for the spikes, meek and ready. 'I'm a dirty stinker, Ernest!'

Father Burner, seated deep in a red leather chair at the sick man's bedside, crossed his legs forcefully. 'Now don't take on so, Father.'

'Don't call me "Father"!' Father Desmond's eyes fluttered open momentarily, but closed again on the reality of it all. 'I don't deserve it. I'm a disgrace to the priesthood! I am not worthy! Lord, Lord, I am not worthy!'

A nurse entered and stuck a thermometer in Father Desmond's mouth.

Father Burner smiled at the nurse. He lit a cigarette and wondered if she understood. The chart probably bore the diagnosis 'pneumonia', but if she had been a nurse very long she would know all about that. She released Father Desmond's wrist and recorded his pulse on her pad. She took the thermometer and left the room.

Father Desmond surged up in bed and flopped, turning with a wrench of the covers, on his stomach. He lay gasping like a fish out of water. Father Burner could smell it on his breath yet.

'Do you want to go to confession?'

'No! I'm not ready for it. I want to remember this time!'

'Oh, all right.' It was funny, if a little tiresome, the way the Irish could exaggerate a situation. They all had access to the same two or three emotions. They all played the same battered barrel organ handed down through generations. Dying, fighting, talking, drinking, praying . . . wakes, wars, politics, pubs, church. The fates were decimated and hamstrung among them. They loved monotony.

Father Desmond, doing the poor soul uttering his last words in italics, said: 'We make too good a thing out of confession, Ernest! Ever think of that, Ernest?' He wagged a nicotined finger. Some of his self-contempt seemed to overshoot its mark and include Father Burner.

Father Burner honked his lips—*plutt!* 'Hire a hall, Ed.'

Father Desmond clawed a rosary out from under his pillow.

Father Burner left.

He put the car in the garage. On the way to his room he passed voices in the Dean's office.

'Father Burner!' the Dean called through the door.

Father Burner stayed in the hallway, only peeping in, indicating numerous commitments elsewhere. Quinlan and Keefe were with the Dean.

'Apparently, Father, you failed to kill yourself.' Then, for Keefe, the Dean said, 'Father Burner fulfils the dream of the American hierarchy and the principle of historical localization. He's been up in his flying machine all morning.'

'I didn't go up.' Sullenness came and went in his voice. 'It rained.' He shuffled one foot, about to leave, when the Dean's left eyebrow wriggled up, warning, holding him.

'I don't believe you've had the pleasure.' The Dean gave Keefe to Father Burner. 'Father Keefe, sir, went through school with Father Quinlan—from the grades through the priesthood.' The Dean described an arc with his breviary, dripping with ribbons, to show the passing years. Father Burner nodded.

'Well?' The Dean frowned at Father Burner. 'Has the cat got your tongue, sir? Why don't you be about greeting Father O'Keefe—or Keefe, is it?'

'Keefe,' Keefe said.

Father Burner, caught in the old amber of his inadequacy, stepped over and shook Keefe's hand once.

Quinlan stood by and let the drama play itself out.

Keefe, smiling a curious mixture more anxiety than amusement, said, 'It's a pleasure, Father.'

'Same here,' Father Burner said.

'Well, good day, sirs!' The Dean cracked open his breviary and began to read, lips twitching.

Father Burner waited for them in the hall. Before he could explain that he thought too much of the Dean not to humour him and that besides the old fool was out of his head, the Dean proclaimed after them, 'The Chancery phones, Father Burner. You will hear confessions there tonight. I suppose one of those Cathedral jokers lost his faculties.'

Yes, Father Burner knew, it was common procedure all right for the Archbishop to confer promotions by private interview, but every time a priest got called to the Cathedral it did not mean simply that. Many received sermons and it was most likely now

someone was needed to hear confessions. And still Father Burner, feeling his pocket, was glad he had not remembered to mail the letter. He would not bother to speak to Quinlan and Keefe now.

III. NIGHT

'And for your penance say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys and pray for my intention. And now make a good act of contrition. *Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus dimissis peccatis tuis . . .*' Father Burner swept out into the current of the prayer, stroking strongly in Latin, while the penitent, a miserable boy coming into puberty, paddled as fast as he could along the shore in English.

Finishing first, Father Burner waited for the boy to conclude. When, breathless, he did, Father Burner anointed the air and shot a whisper, 'God bless you,' kicking the window shut with the heel of his hand, ejecting the boy, an ear of corn shucked clean, into the world again. There was nobody on the other side of the confessional, so Father Burner turned on the signal light. A big spider drowsy in his web, drugged with heat and sins, he sat waiting for the next one to be hurled into his presence by guilt ruddy ripe, as with the boy, or, as with the old ladies who come early and try to stay late, by the spiritual famine of their lives or simply the desire to tell secrets in the dark.

He held his wrist in such a way as to see the sweat gleaming in the hairs. He looked at his watch. He had been at it since seven and now it was after nine. If there were no more kneeling in his section of the Cathedral at 9.30 he could close up and have a cigarette. He was too weary to read his office, though he had the Little Hours, Vespers, and Compline still to go. It was the last minutes in the confessional that got him—the insensible end of the excursion that begins with so many sinewy sensations and good intentions to look sharp at the landscape. In the last minutes how many priests, would-be surgeons of the soul, ended as blacksmiths, hammering out absolution anyway?

A few of the Cathedral familiars still drifted around the floor. They were day and night in the shadows praying. Meeting one of them, Father Burner always wanted to get away. They were collectors of priests' blessings in a day when most priests felt ashamed to raise their hands to God outside the ceremonies. Their

respect for a priest was fanatic, that of the unwordly, the martyrs, for an emissary of heaven. They were so desperately disposed to death that the manner of dying was their greatest concern. But Father Burner had an idea there were more dull pretenders than saints among them. They inspired no unearthly feelings in him, as true sanctity was supposed to, and he felt it was all right not to like them. They spoke of God, the Blessed Virgin, of miracles, cures, and visitations, as of people and items in the news, which was annoying. The Cathedral, because of its location, described by brokers as exclusive, was not so much frequented by these wretches as it would have been if more convenient to the slums. But nevertheless a few came there, like the diarrhoeic pigeons, also a scandal to the neighbourhood, and would not go away. Father Burner, from his glancing contact with them, had concluded that body odour is the real odour of sanctity.

Through the grating now Father Burner saw the young Vicar General stop a little distance up the aisle and speak to a couple of people who were possible prospects for Father Burner. 'Anyone desiring to go to confession should do so at once. In a few minutes the priests will be gone from the confessionals.' He crossed to the other side of the Cathedral.

Father Burner did not like to compare his career with the Vicar General's. The Archbishop had taken the Vicar General, a younger man than Father Burner by at least fifteen years, direct from the seminary. After a period of trial as Chancellor, he was raised to his present eminence—for reasons much pondered by the clergy and more difficult to discern than those obviously accounted for by intelligence, appearance, and, post factum, the loyalty consequent upon his selection over many older and possibly abler men. It was a medieval act of preference, a slap in the face to the monsignori, a rebuke to the principle of advancement by years applied elsewhere. The Vicar General had the quality of inscrutability in an ideal measure. He did not seem at all given to gossip or conspiracy or even to that owlsh secrecy peculiar to secretaries and so exasperating to others. He had possibly no enemies and certainly no intimates. In time he would be a bishop unless, as was breathed wherever the Cloth gathered over food and drink, he really was 'troubled with sanctity', which might lead to anything else, the cloister or insanity.

The Vicar General appeared at the door of Father Burner's

compartment. 'The Archbishop will see you, Father, before you leave tonight.' He went up the aisle, genuflected before the main altar, opened as a gate one of the host of brass angels surrounding the sanctuary, and entered the sacristies.

Before he would let hope have its way with him, Father Burner sought to recast the expression on the Vicar General's face. He could recall nothing significant. Very probably there had been nothing to see. Then, with a rush, he permitted himself to think this was his lucky day. Already he was formulating the way he would let the news out, providing he decided not to keep it a secret for a time. He might do that. It would be delicious to go about his business until the very last minute, to savour the old aggravations and feel none of the sting, to receive the old quips and smiles with good grace and know them to be toothless. The news, once out, would fly through the diocese. Hear about Burner at Saint Pat's, Tom? Finally landed himself a parish. Yeah, I just had it from McKenna. So I guess the A. B. wasn't so sore at the Round One after all. Well, he's just ornery enough to make a go of it.

Father Burner, earlier in the evening, had smoked a cigarette with one of the young priests attached to the Cathedral (a class-mate of Quinlan's but not half the prig), stalling, hoping someone would come and say the Archbishop wanted to see him. When nothing happened except the usual small talk and introductions to a couple of missionaries stopping over, he had given up hope easily. He had seen the basis for his expectations as folly once more. It did not bother him after the fact was certain. He was amenable to any kind of finality. He had a light heart for a Ger—an American of German descent. And his hopes rose higher each time and with less cause. He was a ball that bounced up only. He had kept faith. And now—his just reward.

A little surprised he had not thought of her first, he admitted his mother into the new order of things. He wanted to open the letter from her, still in his coat, and late as it was send her a wire, which would do her more good than a night's sleep. He thought of himself back in her kitchen, home from the sem for the holidays, a bruiser in a tight black suit, his feet heavy on the oven door. She was fussing at the stove and he was promising her a porcelain one as big as a house after he got his parish. But he let her know, kidding on the square, that he would be running things at the

rectory. It would not be the old story of the priest taking orders from his housekeeper, even if she was his mother (seminarians, from winter evenings of shooting the bull, knew only too well the pitfalls of parish life), or as with Ed Desmond a few years ago when his father was still living with him, the old man losing his marbles one by one, butting in when people came for advice and instructions, finally coming to believe he was the one to say Mass in his son's absence—no need to get a strange priest in—and sneaking into the box to hear confessions the day before they took him away.

He would be gentle with his mother, however, even if she talked too much, as he recalled she did the last time he saw her. She was well-preserved and strong for her age and ought to be able to keep the house up. Once involved in the social life of the parish she could be a valuable agent in coping with any lay opposition, which was too often the case when a new priest took over.

He resolved to show no nervousness before the Archbishop. A trifle surprised, yes—the Archbishop must have his due—but not overly affected by good fortune. If questioned, he would display a lot of easy confidence not unaccompanied by a touch of humility, a phrase or two like 'God willing' or 'with the help of Almighty God and your prayers, Your Excellency.' He would also not forget to look the part—reliable, casual, cool, an iceberg, only the tip of his true worth showing.

At precisely 9.30 Father Burner picked up his breviary and backed out of the stall. But then there was the scuff of a foot and the tap of one of the confessional doors closing and then, to tell him the last penitent was a woman, the scent of apple blossoms. He turned off the light, saying 'Damn!' to himself, and sat down again inside. He threw back the partition and led off, 'Yes?' He placed his hand alongside his head and listened, looking down into the deeper darkness of his cassock sleeve.

'I . . .'

'Yes?' At the heart of the apple blossoms another scent bloomed: gin and vermouth.

'Bless me, Father, I . . . have sinned.'

Father Burner knew this kind. They would always wait until the last moment. How they managed to get themselves into church at all, and then into the confessional, was a mystery.

Sometimes liquor thawed them out. This one was evidently young, nubile. He had a feeling it was going to be adultery. He guessed it was up to him to get her under way.

'How long since your last confession?'

'I don't know . . .'

'Have you been away from the Church?'

'Yes.'

'Are you married?'

'Yes.'

'To a Catholic?'

'No.'

'Protestant?'

'No.'

'Jew?'

'No.'

'Atheist?'

'No—nothing.'

'Were you married by a priest?'

'Yes.'

'How long ago was that?'

'Four years.'

'Any children?'

'No.'

'Practise birth control?'

'Yes, sometimes.'

'Don't you know it's a crime against nature and the Church forbids it?'

'Yes.'

'Don't you know that France fell because of birth control?'

'No.'

'Well, it did. Was it your husband's fault?'

'You mean—the birth control?'

'Yes.'

'Not wholly.'

'And you've been away from the Church ever since your marriage?'

'Yes.'

'Now you see why the Church is against mixed marriages. All right, go on. What else?'

'I don't know . . .'

'Is that what you came to confess?'

'No. Yes. I'm sorry, I'm afraid that's all.'

'Do you have a problem?'

'I think that's all, Father.'

'Remember, it is your obligation, and not mine, to examine your conscience. The task of instructing persons with regard to these delicate matters—I refer to the connubial relationship—is not an easy one. Nevertheless, since there is a grave obligation imposed by God, it cannot be shirked. If you have a problem—'

'I don't have a *problem*.'

'Remember, God never commands what is impossible and so if you make use of the sacraments regularly you have every reason to be confident that you will be able to overcome this evil successfully, with His help. I hope this is all clear to you.'

'All clear.'

'Then if you are heartily sorry for your sins, for your penance say the rosary daily for one week and remember it is the law of the Church that you attend Mass on Sundays and holy days and receive the sacraments at least once a year. It's better to receive them often. Ask your pastor about birth control if it's still not clear to you. Or read a Catholic book on the subject. And now make a good act of contrition . . .'

Father Burner climbed the three flights of narrow stairs. He waited a moment in silence, catching his breath. He knocked on the door and was suddenly afraid its density prevented him from being heard and that he might be found standing there like a fool or a spy. But to knock again, if heard the first time, would seem importunate.

'Come in, Father.'

At the other end of the long study the Archbishop sat behind an ebony desk. Father Burner waited before him as though expected not to be asked to sit down. The only light in the room, a lamp on the desk, was so set that it kept the Archbishop's face in the dark, fell with a gentle sparkle upon his pectoral cross, and was absorbed all around by the fabric of the piped cloth he wore. Father Burner's eyes came to rest upon the Archbishop's freckled hand—ringed, square, and healthy.

'Be seated, Father.'

'Thank you, Your Excellency.'

'Oh, sit in this chair, Father.' There were two chairs. Father Burner changed to the soft one. He had a suspicion that in choosing the other one he had fallen into a silly trap, that it was a game the Archbishop played with his visitors: the innocent ones, seeing no issue, would take the soft chair, because handier; the guilty would go a step out of their way to take the hard one. 'I called Saint Patrick's this morning, Father, but you were . . . out.'

'I was visiting Father Desmond, Your Excellency.'

'Father Desmond . . .'

'He's in the hospital.'

'I know. Friend of his, are you, Father?'

'No, Your Excellency. Well'—Father Burner waited for the cock to crow the third time—'yes, I *know* the man.' At once he regretted the scriptural complexion of the words and wondered if it were possible for the Archbishop not to be thinking of the earlier betrayal.

'It was good of you to visit Father Desmond, especially since you are not close to him. I hope he is better, Father.'

'He is, Your Excellency.'

The Archbishop got up and went across the room to a cabinet. 'Will you have a little glass of wine, Father?'

'No. No, thanks, Your Excellency.' Immediately he realized it could be another trap and, if so, he was caught again.

'Then I'll have a drop . . . *solus*.' The Archbishop poured a glass and brought it back to the desk. 'A little wine for the stomach's sake, Father.'

Father Burner, not sure what he was expected to say to that, nodded gravely and said, 'Yes, Your Excellency'. He had seen that the Archbishop wore carpet slippers and that they had holes in both toes.

'But perhaps you've read Saint Bernard, Father, and recall where he says we priests remember well enough the apostolic counsel to use wine, but overlook the adjective "little".'

'I must confess I haven't read Saint Bernard lately, Your Excellency.' Father Burner believed this was somehow in his favour. 'Since seminary, in fact.'

'Not all priests, Father, have need of him. A hard saint . . . for hardened sinners. What is your estimate of Saint Paul?'

Father Burner felt familiar ground under his feet at last. There

were the Pauline and Petrine factions—a futile business, he thought—but he knew where the Archbishop stood and exclaimed, ‘One of the greatest—’

‘Really! So many young men today consider him . . . a bore. It’s always the deep-breathing ones, I notice. They say he cuts it too fine.’

‘I’ve never thought so, Your Excellency.’

‘Indeed? Well, it’s a question I like to ask my priests. Perhaps you knew that.’

‘No, I didn’t, Your Excellency.’

‘So much the better then . . . but I see you appraising the melodeon, Father. Are you musical?’

‘Not at all, Your Excellency. Violin lessons as a child.’ Father Burner laughed quickly, as though it were nothing.

‘But you didn’t go on with them?’

‘No, Your Excellency.’ He did not mean it to sound as sad as it came out.

‘What a pity.’

‘No great loss, Your Excellency.’

‘You are too . . . modest, Father. But perhaps the violin was not your instrument.’

‘I guess it wasn’t, Your Excellency.’ Father Burner laughed out too loud.

‘And you have the choir at Saint Patrick’s, Father?’

‘Not this year, Your Excellency. Father Quinlan has it.’

‘Now I recall . . .’

‘Yes.’ So far as he was concerned—and there were plenty of others who thought so, too—Quinlan had played hell with the choir, canning all the women, some of them members for fifteen and twenty years, a couple even longer and practically living for it, and none of them as bad as Quinlan said. The liturgical stuff that Quinlan tried to pull off was all right in monasteries, where they had the time to train for it, but in a parish it sounded stodgy to ears used to the radio and split up the activity along sexual lines, which was really old hat in the modern world. The Dean liked it though. He called it ‘honest’ and eulogized the men from the pulpit—not a sign that he heard how they brayed and whined and just gave out or failed to start—and each time it happened ladies in the congregation were sick and upset for days afterward, for he inevitably ended by attacking women, pants, cocktails,

communism, cigarettes, and running around half naked. The women looked at the men in the choir, all pretty in surplices, and said to themselves they knew plenty about some of them and what they had done to some women.

‘He’s tried a little Gregorian, hasn’t he—Father Quinlan?’

‘Yes, Your Excellency,’ Father Burner said. ‘He has.’

‘Would you say it’s been a success—or perhaps I should ask you first if you care for Gregorian, Father.’

‘Oh, yes, Your Excellency. Very much.’

‘Many, I know, don’t . . . I’ve been told our chant sounds like a wild bull in a red barn or consumptives coughing into a bottle, but I will have it in the Cathedral, Father. Other places, I am aware, have done well with . . . light opera.’

Father Burner frowned.

‘We are told the people prefer and understand it. But at the risk of seeming reactionary, a fate my office prevents me from escaping in any event, I say we spend more time listening to the voice of the people than is good for either it or us. We have been too generous with our ears, Father. We have handed over our tongues also. When they are restored to us I wonder if we shall not find our ears more itching than before and our tongues more tied than ever.’

Father Burner nodded in the affirmative.

‘We are now entering the whale’s tail, Father. We must go back the way we came in.’ The Archbishop lifted the lid of the humidor on the desk. ‘Will you smoke, Father?’

‘No, thanks, Your Excellency.’

The Archbishop let the lid drop. ‘Today there are few saints, fewer sinners, and everybody is already saved. We are all heroes in search of an underdog. As for villains, the classic kind with no illusions about themselves, they are . . . extinct. The very devil, for instance—where the devil is the devil today, Father?’

Father Burner, as the Archbishop continued to look at him, bit his lips for the answer, secretly injured that he should be expected to know, bewildered even as the children he toyed with in catechism.

The Archbishop smiled, but Father Burner was not sure at what—whether at him or what had been said. ‘Did you see, Father, where our brother Bishop Buckles said Hitler remains the one power on earth against the Church?’

Yes, Father Burner remembered seeing it in the paper; it was the sort of thing that kept Quinlan talking for days. 'I did, Your Excellency.'

'Alas, poor Buckles! He's a better croquet player than that.' The Archbishop's hands unclasped suddenly and fell upon his memo pad. He tore off about a week and seemed to feel better for it. His hands, with no hint of violence about them now, came together again. 'We look hard to the right and left, Father. It is rather to the centre, I think, we should look—to ourselves, the devil in us.'

Father Burner knew the cue for humility when he heard it. 'Yes, Your Excellency.'

With his chubby fingers the Archbishop made a steeple that was more like a dome. His eyes were reading the memo. 'For instance, Father, I sometimes appear at banquets—when they can't line up a good foreign correspondent—banquets at which the poor are never present and at which I am unfailingly confronted by someone exceedingly well off who is moved to inform me that "religion" is a great consolation to him. Opium, rather, I always think, perhaps wrongfully and borrowing a word from one of our late competitors, which is most imprudent of me, a bishop.'

The Archbishop opened a drawer and drew out a sheet of paper and an envelope. 'Yes, the rich have souls,' he said softly, answering an imaginary objection which happened to be Father Burner's. 'But if Christ were really with them they would not be themselves—that is to say, rich.'

'Very true, Your Excellency,' Father Burner said.

The Archbishop faced sideways to use an old typewriter. 'And likewise, lest we forget, we would not be ourselves, that is to say—what? For we square the circle beautifully in almost every country on earth. We bring neither peace nor a sword. The rich give us money. We give them consolation and make of the eye of the needle a gate. Together we try to reduce the Church, the Bride of Christ, to a streetwalker.' The Archbishop rattled the paper, Father Burner's future, into place and rolled it crookedly into the typewriter. 'Unfortunately for us, it doesn't end there. The penance will not be shared so equitably. Your Christian name, Father, is——?'

'Ernest, Your Excellency.'

The Archbishop typed several words and stopped, looking over at Father Burner. 'I can't call to mind a single Saint Ernest, Father. Can you help me?'

'There were two, I believe, Your Excellency, but Butler leaves them out of his *Lives*.'

'They would be German saints, Father?'

'Yes, Your Excellency. There was one an abbot and the other an archbishop.'

'If Butler had been Irish, as the name has come to indicate, I'd say that's an Irishman for you, Father. He does not forget to include a power of Irish saints.' The Archbishop was Irish himself. Father Burner begged to differ with him, believing here was a wrong deliberately set up for him to right. 'I am not Irish myself, Your Excellency, but some of my best friends are.'

'Tut, tut, Father. Such tolerance will be the death of you.' The Archbishop, typing a few words, removed the paper, signed it and placed it in the envelope. He got up and took down a book from the shelves. He flipped it open, glanced through several pages and returned it to its place. 'No Ernests in Baring-Gould either. Well, Father, it looks as if you have a clear field.'

The Archbishop came from behind the desk and Father Burner, knowing the interview was over, rose. The Archbishop handed him the envelope. Father Burner stuffed it hastily in his pocket and knelt, the really important thing, to kiss the Archbishop's ring and receive his blessing. They walked together toward the door.

'Do you care for pictures, Father?'

'Oh, yes, Your Excellency.'

The Archbishop, touching him lightly on the arm, stopped before a reproduction of Raphael's Sistine Madonna. 'There is a good peasant woman, Father, and a nice fat baby.' Father Burner nodded his appreciation. 'She could be Our Blessed Mother, Father, though I doubt it. There is no question about the baby. He is not Christ.' The Archbishop moved to another picture. 'Rembrandt had the right idea, Father. See the gentleman pushing Christ up on the cross? That is Rembrandt, a self-portrait.' Father Burner thought of some of the stories about the Archbishop, that he slept on a cot, stood in line with the people sometimes to go to confession, that he fasted on alternate days the year round. Father Burner was thankful for such men as the Archbishop. 'But here is Christ, Father.' This time it was a glassy-eyed Christ whose

head lay against the rough wood of the cross he was carrying. 'That is Christ, Father. The Greek painted Our Saviour.'

The Archbishop opened the door for Father Burner, saying, 'And, Father, you will please not open the envelope until after your Mass tomorrow.'

Father Burner went swiftly down the stairs. Before he got into his car he looked up at the Cathedral. He could scarcely see the cross glowing on the dome. It seemed as far away as the stars. The cross needed a brighter light or the dome ought to be painted gold and lit up like the state capitol, so people would see it. He drove a couple of blocks down the street, pulled up to the curb, opened the envelope, which had not been sealed, and read: 'You will report on August 8 to the Reverend Michael Furlong, to begin your duties on that day as his assistant. I trust that in your new appointment you will find not peace but a sword.'

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD ON THE PLATEAU

CUZCO . . TITICACA . . LA PAZ.

FROM Lima, in three hours, you can fly to Arequipa—nearly half the length of Peru. Even if you are nervous in planes, as I am, you will hardly hesitate to do this, for the alternative is about sixty hours in an overcrowded, overdriven bus, with sand in your mouth, eyes and hair, and the dubious prospect of meals at dirty inns along the road. The coast of Peru is almost entirely desert, broken occasionally by narrow green valleys which follow the straggling course of a river. From above, the landscape looks like crusty yellow bread, with round loaf-shaped hills dimpled as if by the print of a cook's thumb. On your left, the sheer wall of the Andes towers up, black and forbidding, with its jagged snow-peaks; on your right is the soft grey emptiness of the Pacific, the silent water-hemisphere beyond the limits of the human world. Poised between these three barren immensities—mountain, desert and ocean—the droning plane seems tiny as an insect. Now and then it is tossed insecurely by the hot uprush of air from a gully. Even on a bright fine morning nature feels hostile here. I never