The River Styx Runs Upstream

by Dan Simmons

Introduction

It's a cliche that writing fiction is a bit like having chil-dren. As with most cliches, there's a base of truth there. Having the idea for a story or novel—that moment of pure inspiration and conception—is as close to ecstasy as writ-ing offers. The actual writing, especially of a novel, runs about the length of a human gestation period and is a time of some discomfort, frequent queasiness, and the absolute assurance of difficult labor before the thing is born. Fi-nally, the stories or books take on a definite life of their own once published and soon are out of the writer's con-trol completely; they travel far, visiting countries that the writer may never see, learning to express themselves flu-ently in languages the author will never begin to master, gaining the ear of readers with levels of affluence and ed-ucation far beyond those of their progenitor, and—perhaps the most galling of all—living on long after the author is dust and a forgotten footnote.

And the ungrateful whelps don't even write home.

"The River Styx Runs Upstream" was conceived on a beautiful August morning in 1979, in the summerhouse behind my wife's parents' home in Kenmore, New York. I remember typing the first paragraph, pausing, and thinking—*This will be my first story to be published.*

It was, but not before two and a half years and a myr-iad of misadventures had passed.

A week after I'd finished writing the first draft of "The River Styx..." I drove from western New York to Rockport, Maine, to pick up my wife Karen after her stay at the Maine Photographic Workshop. Along the way, I spent a day in Exeter, New Hampshire, meeting and talk-ing to a respected writer whom I'd previously only corre-sponded with. His advice: submit to the "little magazines," spend years—perhaps decades—building a reputation in these limited-circulation, contributor-copy-in-lieu-of-pay markets before even *thinking* about trying a novel, and then spend more years producing these small books from little-known publishers, reaching only a thou-sand or so readers but trying to acquire some critical un-derpinning.

I picked up Karen in Rockport and we began the long drive back to our home in Colorado. I was silent much of the time, pondering the writer's advice. It was sage advice—only one would-be writer in hundreds, perhaps thousands, achieves publication. Of those who publish, a scant few manage to make a living at it ... even a "liv-ing" below the poverty line. The statistical chances of be-coming a "bestselling author" are approximately the same as being struck by lightning while simultaneously being attacked by a great white shark.

So between Rockport, Maine, and the front range of Colorado, I pondered, decided that the advice was un-doubtedly sound, realized that the "little magazine route" was almost certainly the wise way to go, and began to un-derstand that it was a sign of maturity to realize that the quest for being a widely read author, a "mass market" writer of quality tales, was a chimera ... something to be given up.

And then, about the time I saw the Rocky Mountains rising from the plains ahead of us, I said, "Nahhh." Per-versely, I decided to go for the widest audience possible.

Cut to the summer of 1981, two years later. Dispir-ited, discouraged, all but broken on the wheel of rejec-tions, chastened by reality, I "gave up" writing for publication and did something I'd sworn I would never do: I went off to a writers' conference. *Paid* to go to a writ-ers' conference. A "how-to", "this is the way to prepare your manuscript", "sit-in-the-circle and we'll critique it" kind of writers' conference. It was my swan song. I went to hear and see the writers present and to begin to view writing as a hobby rather than obsession.

Then I met Harlan Ellison.

I won't bore you with the details of that meeting. I won't describe the carnage that acted as prelude as the legendary *enfant terrible* beheaded, disemboweled, and generally dismembered the unfortunate would-be writers who had submitted stories for his critical approval.

Between story critiques, while Harlan Ellison rested and sipped Perrier, officials of the workshop rushed into the seminar room, carried out the scattered body parts, hosed down the walls, spread sawdust on the carpet, and generally made ready for the next sacrifice.

As it turned out, *I* was the next sacrifice.

"Who is this *Simmons*?" bellowed Ellison. "Stand up, wave your hand, *show* yourself, goddammit. What egomaniacal monstrosity has the fucking *gall*, the unmiti-gated *hubris* to inflict a story of *five thousand fucking words* on this workshop? *Show yourself, Simmons!*"

In one of the braver (read 'insane') moments of my life, I waggled my fingers. Stood.

Ellison stared at me over the top of his glasses. "At this length, it had better be *good*, Simmons ... no, it had bet-ter be fucking *brilliant*, or you will not leave this room alive. *Comprende? Capish?*"

I left the room alive. In fact, I left it more alive than I had been in some years. It was not merely that Ellison had liked it. He ... he and Ed Bryant and several of the other writers there ... had found every flaw in the story, had re-vealed every false note and fake wall, had honed in on the places where I'd tapdanced fast rather than do the neces-sary work, had pulled the curtain off every crippled sen-tence and humbug

phrase. *But they had taken the story seriously.*

Harlan Ellison did more than that. He told me what I had known for years but had lost the nerve to believe—he told me that I had no choice but to continue writing, whether anything was ever published or not. He told me that few heard the music but those who did had no choice but to follow the piper. He told me that if I didn't get back to the typewriter and keep working that he would fly to Colorado and rip my fucking nose off.

I went back to the typewriter. Ed Bryant was generous enough to allow me to become the first unpublished writer to attend the Milford Writers' Conference ... where I learned to play pool with the big boys.

That autumn, I submitted the revised "The River Styx Runs Upstream" to *Twilight Zone Magazine* for their first annual contest for unpublished writers. According to the folks at *TZ*, more than nine thousand stories came in over the transom and had to be read and judged. "The River Styx..." tied for first place with a story by W.C. Norris.

Thus, my first published story reached the stands on February 15, 1982. It happened to be the same day that our daughter, Jane, was born.

It was some time before anyone, even I, really noticed that I'd been published. Analogies are fine and the similar-ities between being published and pregnancy are clever enough, but when it comes to being born—babies are the real thing.

And so, submitted for your approval (as a certain gen-tleman once said)—a story about love, and loss, and about the sad necessity sometimes to surrender what thou lov'st well.

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What thou lovest well remains
the rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft
from thee
What thou lov'st well is thy
true heritage...
—Ezra Pound, Canto LXXXI

I loved my mother very much. After her funeral, after the coffin was lowered, the family went home and waited for her return.

I was only eight at the time. Of the required ceremony I remember little. I recall that the collar of the previous year's shirt was far too tight and that the unaccustomed tie was like a noose around my neck. I remember that the June day was too beautiful for such a solemn gathering. I remember Uncle Will's heavy drinking that morning and the bottle of Jack Daniels he pulled out as we drove home from the funeral. I remember my father's face.

The afternoon was too long. I had no role to play in the family's gathering that day, and the adults ignored me. I found myself wandering from room to room with a warm glass of Kool-Aid, until finally I escaped to the backyard. Even that familiar landscape of play and seclusion was ruined by the glimpse of pale, fat faces staring out from the neighbor's windows. They were waiting. Hoping for a glimpse. I felt like shouting, throwing rocks at them. In-stead I sat down on the old tractor tire we used as a sand-box. Very deliberately I poured the red Kool-Aid into the sand and watched the spreading stain digging a small pit.

They're digging her *up now.*

I ran to the swing set and angrily began to pump my legs against the bare soil. The swing creaked with rust, and one leg of the frame rose out of the ground.

No, they've already done that, stupid. Now they're hooking her up to big machines. Will they pump the blood back into her?

I thought of bottles hanging. I remembered the fat, red ticks that clung to our dog in the summer. Angry, I swung high, kicking up hard even when there was no more height to be gained.

Do her fingers twitch first? Or do her eyes just slide open like an owl waking up?

I reached the high point of my arc and jumped. For a second I was weightless and I hung above the earth like Superman, like a spirit flying from its body. Then gravity claimed me and I fell heavily on my hands and knees. I had scraped my palms and put grass stain on my right knee. Mother would be angry.

She's being walked around now. Maybe they're dress-ing her like one of the mannikins in Mr. Feldman's store window.

My brother Simon came out to the backyard. Although he was only two years older, Simon looked like an adult to me that afternoon. An old adult. His blond hair, as re-cently cut as mine, hung down in limp bangs across a pale forehead. His eyes looked tired. Simon almost never yelled at me. But he did that day.

"Get in here. It's almost time."

I followed him through the back porch. Most of the relatives had left, but from the living room we could hear Uncle Will. He was shouting. We paused in the hallway to listen.

"For Chrissakes, Les, there's still time. You just can't do this."

"It's already done."

"Think of the ... Jesus Christ ... think of the kids."

We could hear the slur of the voices and knew that Un-cle Will had been drinking more. Simon put his finger to his lips. There was a silence.

"Les, think about just the money side of it. What's ... how much .. . it's twenty-five percent of everything you have. For how many years, Les? Think of the kids. What'll that do to—

"It's *done*, Will."

We had never heard that tone from Father before. It was not argumentative—the way it was when he and Un-cle Will used to argue politics late at night. It was not sad like the time he talked to Simon and me after he had brought Mother home from the hospital the first time. It was just final.

There was more talk. Uncle Will started shouting. Even the silences were angry. We went to the kitchen to get a Coke. When we came back down the hallway, Uncle Will almost ran over us in his rush to leave. The door slammed behind him. He never entered our home again.

They brought Mother home just after dark. Simon and I were looking out the picture window and we could feel the neighbors watching. Only Aunt Helen and a few of our closest relatives had stayed. I felt Father's surprise when he saw the car. I don't know what we'd been expecting—maybe a long black hearse like the one that had carried Mother to the cemetery that morning.

They drove up in a yellow Toyota. There were four men in the car with Mother. Instead of dark suits like the one Father was wearing, they had on pastel, short-sleeved shirts. One of the men got out of the car and offered his hand to Mother.

I wanted to rush to the door and down the sidewalk to her, but Simon grabbed my wrist and we stood back in the hallway while Father and the other grownups opened the door.

They came up the sidewalk in the glow of the gaslight on the lawn. Mother was between the two men, but they were not really helping her walk, just guiding her a little. She wore the light blue dress she had bought at Scott's just before she got sick. I had expected her to look all pale and waxy—like when I peeked through the crack in the bed-room door before the men from the funeral home came to take her body away—but her face was flushed and healthy, almost sunburned.

When they stepped onto the front stoop, I could see that she was wearing a lot of makeup. Mother never wore makeup. The two men also had pink cheeks. All three of them had the same smile.

When they came into the house, I think we all took a step back—except for Father. He put his hands on Moth-er's arms, looked at her a long time, and kissed her on the cheek. I don't think she kissed him back. Her smile did not change. Tears were running down Father's face. I felt embarrassed.

The Resurrectionists were saying something. Father and Aunt Helen nodded. Mother just stood there, still smil-ing slightly, and looked politely at the yellow-shirted man as he spoke and joked and patted Father on the back. Then it was our turn to hug Mother. Aunt Helen moved Simon forward, and I was still hanging onto Simon's hand. He kissed her on the cheek and quickly moved back to Fa-ther's side. I threw my arms around her neck and kissed her on the lips. I had *missed* her.

Her skin wasn't cold. It was just *different*.

She was looking right at me. Baxter, our German shep-herd, began to whine and scratch at the back door.

Father took the Resurrectionists into the study. We heard snatches of conversation down the hall.

"...if you think of it as a stroke..."

"How long will she..."

"You understand the tithing is necessary because of the expenses of monthly care and..."

The women relatives stood in a circle around Mother. There was an awkward moment until they realized that Mother did not speak. Aunt Helen reached her hand out and touched her sister's cheek. Mother smiled and smiled.

Then Father was back and his voice was loud and hearty. He explained how similar it was to a light stroke—did we remember Uncle Richard? Meanwhile, Father kissed people repeatedly and thanked everyone.

The Resurrectionists left with smiles and signed pa-pers. The remaining relatives began to leave soon after that. Father saw them down the walk, smiling and shaking their hands.

"Think of it as though she's been ill but has recov-ered," said Father. "Think of her as home from the hospi-tal."

Aunt Helen was the last to leave. She sat next to Mother for a long time, speaking softly and searching Mother's face for a response. After a while Aunt Helen began to cry.

"Think of it as if she's recovered from an illness," said Father as he walked her to her car. "Think of her as home from the hospital."

Aunt Helen nodded, still crying, and left. I think she knew what Simon and I knew. Mother was not home from the hospital. She was home from the grave.

For the first week, Father slept with Mother in the same room where they had always slept. In the morning his face would sag and he would snap at us while we ate our cereal. Then he moved to his study and slept on the old divan in there.

The night was long. Several times I thought I heard the soft slap of Mother's slippers on the hallway floor and my breathing stopped, waiting for the door to open. But it didn't. The moonlight lay across my legs and exposed a patch of wallpaper next to the dresser. The flower pattern looked like the face of a great, sad beast. Just before dawn, Simon leaned across from his bed and whispered, "Go to sleep, stupid." And so I did.

The summer was very hot. No one would play with us, so Simon and I played together. Father had only morning classes at the University. Mother moved around the house and watered the plants a lot. Once Simon and I saw her watering a plant that had died and been removed while she was at the hospital in April. The water ran across the top of the cabinet and dripped on the floor. Mother did not no-tice.

When Mother did go outside, the forest preserve be-hind our house seemed to draw her in. Perhaps it was the darkness. Simon and I used to enjoy playing at the edge of it after twilight, catching fireflies in a jar or building blan-ket tents, but after Mother began walking there Simon spent the evenings inside or on the front lawn. I stayed back there because sometimes Mother wandered and I would take her by the arm and lead her back to the house.

Mother wore whatever Father told her to wear. Some-times he was rushed to get to class and would say, "Wear the red dress," and Mother would spend a sweltering July day in heavy wool. She didn't sweat. Sometimes he would not tell her to come downstairs in the morning, and she would remain in the bedroom until he returned. On those days I tried to get Simon at least to go upstairs and look in on her with me; but he just stared at me and shook his head. Father was drinking more, like Uncle Will used to, and he would yell at us for nothing at all. I always cried when Father shouted; but Simon never cried anymore.

Mother never blinked. At first I didn't notice; but then I began to feel uncomfortable when I saw that she never blinked. But it didn't make me love her any less.

Neither Simon nor I could fall asleep at night. Mother used to tuck us in and tell us long stories about a magician named Yandy who took our dog, Baxter, on great adven-tures when we weren't playing with him. Father didn't make up stories, but he used to read to us from a big book he called Pound's *Cantos*. I didn't understand most of what he read, but the words felt good and I loved the sounds of words he said were Greek. Now nobody checked in on us after our baths. I tried telling stories to Simon for a few nights, but they were no good and Simon asked me to stop.

On the Fourth of July, Tommy Wiedermeyer, who had been in my class the year before, drowned in the swim-ming pool they had just put in.

That night we all sat out back and watched the fire-works above the fairgrounds half

a mile away. You couldn't see the ground displays because of the forest pre-serve, but the skyrockets were bright and clear. First you would see the explosion of color and then, four or five seconds later it seemed, the sound would catch up. I turned to say something to Aunt Helen and saw Mother looking out from the second-story window. Her face was very white against the dark room, and the colors seemed to flow down over her like fluids.

It was not long after the Fourth that I found the dead squirrel. Simon and I had been playing Cavalry and Indi-ans in the forest preserve. We took turns finding each other ... shooting and dying repeatedly in the weeds until it was time to start over. Only this time I was having trou-ble finding him. Instead, I found the clearing.

It was a hidden place, surrounded by bushes as thick as our hedge. I was still on my hands and knees from crawl-ing under the branches when I saw the squirrel. It was large and reddish and had been dead for some time. The head had been wrenched around almost backwards on the body. Blood had dried near one ear. Its left paw was clenched, but the other lay open on a twig as if it were resting there. Something had taken one eye, but the other stared blackly at the canopy of branches. Its mouth was open slightly, showing surprisingly large teeth gone yellow at the roots. As I watched, an ant came out of the mouth, crossed the dark muzzle, and walked out onto the staring eye.

This is what dead is, I thought.

The bushes vibrated to some unfelt breeze. I was scared to be there and I left, crawling straight ahead and bashing through thick branches that grabbed at my shirt.

In the autumn I went back to Longfellow School, but soon transferred to a private school. The Resurrectionist families were discriminated against in those days. The kids made fun of us or called us names and no one played with us. No one played with us at the new school either, but they didn't call us names.

Our bedroom had no wall switch but an old-fashioned hanging lightbulb with a cord. To turn on the light I had to cross half the dark room and feel around until I found the cord. Once when Simon was staying up late to do his homework, I went upstairs by myself. I was swinging my arm around in the darkness to find the string when my hand fell on Mother's face. Her teeth felt cool and slick. I pulled my hand back and stood there a minute in the dark before I found the cord and turned on the light.

"Hello, Mother," I said. I sat on the edge of the bed and looked up at her. She was staring at Simon's empty bed. I reached out and took her hand. "I miss you," I said. I said some other things, but the words got all mixed up and sounded stupid, so I just sat there, holding her hand, waiting for some returning pressure. My arm got tired, but I remained sitting there and holding her fingers in mine until Simon came up. He stopped in the doorway and stared at us. I looked down and dropped her

hand. After a few minutes she went away.

Father's classes had fewer and fewer students and fi-nally he took a sabbatical to write his book on Ezra Pound. He was home all that year, but he didn't write much. Sometimes he would spend the morning down at the li-brary, but he would be home by one o'clock and would watch TV. He would start drinking before dinner and stay in front of the television until really late. Simon and I would stay up with him sometimes; but we didn't like most of the shows.

Simon's dream started about then. He told me about it on the way to school one morning. He said the dream was always the same. When he fell asleep, he would dream that he was still awake, reading a comic book. Then he would start to set the comic on the nightstand, and it would fall on the floor. When he reached down to pick it up, Mother's arm would come out from under the bed and she would grasp his wrist with her white hand. He said her grip was very strong, and somehow he knew that she wanted him under the bed with her. He would hang onto the blankets as hard as he could, but he knew that in a few seconds the bedclothes would slip and he would fall.

He said that last night's dream had finally been a little different. This time Mother had stuck her head out from under the bed. Simon said that it was like when a garage mechanic slides out from under a car. He said she was grinning at him, not smiling but grinning real wide. Simon said that her teeth had been filed down to points.

"Do you ever have dreams like that?" he asked. I knew he was sorry he'd told me.

"No," I said. I loved Mother.

Father put Baxter to sleep just before Thanksgiving. He was not an old dog, but he acted like one. He was al-ways growling and barking, even at us, and he would never come inside anymore. After he ran away for the third time, the pound called us. Father just said, "Put him to sleep," and hung up the phone. They sent us a bill.

That April the Farley twins from the next block acci-dentally locked themselves in an abandoned freezer and suffocated. Mrs. Hargill, our cleaning lady, found them, out behind their garage. Thomas Farley had been the only kid who still invited Simon over to his yard. Now Simon only had me.

It was just before Labor Day and the start of school that Simon made plans for us to run away. I didn't want to run away, but I loved Simon. He was my brother.

"Where are we gonna go?"

"We got to get out of here," he said. Which wasn't much of an answer.

But Simon had set aside a bunch of stuff and even picked up a city map. He'd sketched out our path through the forest preserve, across Sherman River at the Laurel Street viaduct, all the way to Uncle Will's house without ever crossing any major streets.

"We can camp out," said Simon. He showed me a length of clothesline he had cut. "Uncle Will will let us be farmhands. When he goes out to his ranch next spring, we can go with him."

We left at twilight. I didn't like leaving right before it got dark, but Simon said that Father wouldn't notice we were gone until late the next morning when he woke up. I carried a small backpack filled with food Simon had sneaked out of the refrigerator. He had some stuff rolled up in a blanket and tied over his back with the piece of clothes-line. It was pretty light out until we got deeper into the for-est preserve. The stream made a gurgling sound like the one that came from Mother's room the night she died. The roots and branches were so thick that Simon had to keep his flashlight on all the time, and that made it seem even darker. We stopped before too long, and Simon strung his rope be-tween two trees. I threw the blanket over it and we both scrabbled around on our hands and knees to find stones.

We ate our bologna sandwiches in the dark while the creek made swallowing noises in the night. We talked a few minutes, but our voices seemed too tiny, and after a while we both fell asleep, on the cold ground with our jackets pulled over us and our heads on the nylon pack and all the forest sounds going on around us.

I woke up in the middle of the night. It was very still. Both of us had huddled down under the jackets, and Simon was snoring. The leaves had stopped stirring, the in-sects were gone, and even the stream had stopped making noise. The openings of the tent made two brighter triangles in the field of darkness.

I sat up with my heart pounding.

There was nothing to see when I moved my head near the opening. But I knew exactly what was out there. I put my head under my jacket and moved away from the side of the tent.

I waited for something to touch me through the blan-ket. At first I thought of Mother coming after us, of Mother walking through the forest after us with sharp twigs brushing at her eyes. But it wasn't Mother.

The night was cold and heavy around our little tent. It was as black as the eye of that dead squirrel, and it wanted in. For the first time in my life I understood that the dark-ness did not end with the morning light. My teeth were chattering. I curled up against Simon and stole a little of his heat. His breath came soft and slow against my cheek. After a while I shook him awake and told him we were going home when the sun rose, that I wasn't going with him. He started to argue, but then he heard something in my voice, something he didn't understand, and he only shook his head tiredly and went back to sleep.

In the morning the blanket was wet with dew and our skins felt clammy. We folded things up, left the rocks lying in their rough pattern, and walked home. We did not speak.

Father was sleeping when we got home. Simon threw our stuff in the bedroom and then he went out into the sunlight. I went to the basement.

It was very dark down there, but I sat on the wooden stairs without turning on a light. There was no sound from the shadowed corners, but I knew that Mother was there.

"We ran away, but we came back," I said at last. "It was my idea to come back."

Through the narrow window slats I saw green grass. A sprinkler started up with a loud sigh. Somewhere in the neighborhood, kids were shouting. I paid attention only to the shadows.

"Simon wanted to keep going," I said, "but I made us come back. It was *my* idea to come home."

I sat a few more minutes but couldn't think of anything else to say. Finally I got up, brushed off my pants, and went upstairs to take a nap.

A week after Labor Day, Father insisted we go to the shore for the weekend. We left on Friday afternoon and drove straight through to Ocean City. Mother sat alone in the rear seat. Father and Aunt Helen rode up front. Simon and I were crowded into the back of the station wagon, but he refused to count cows with me or talk to me or even play with the toy planes I'd brought along.

We stayed at an ancient hotel right on the boardwalk. The other Resurrectionists in Father's Tuesday group rec-ommended the place, but it smelled of age and rot and rats in the walls. The corridors were a faded green, the doors a darker green, and only every third light worked. The halls were a dim maze, and you had to make two turns just to find the elevator. Everyone but Simon stayed inside all day Saturday, sitting in front of the laboring air condi-tioner and watching television. There were many more of the resurrected around now, and you could hear them shuf-fling through the dark halls. After sunset they went out to the beach, and we joined them.

I tried to make Mother comfortable. I set the beach towel down for her and turned her to face the sea. By this time the moon had risen and a cool breeze was blowing in. I put Mother's sweater across her shoulders. Behind us the midway splashed lights out over the boardwalk and the roller coaster rumbled and growled.

I would not have left if Father's voice hadn't irritated me so. He talked too loudly, laughed at nothing, and took deep drinks from a bottle in a brown bag. Aunt Helen said very little but watched Father sadly and tried to smile when he laughed. Mother was sitting peacefully, so I ex-cused myself and walked up to the midway to hunt for

Si-mon. I was lonely without him. The place was empty of families and children, but the rides were still running. Ev-ery few minutes there would be a roar and screams from the few riders as the roller coaster took its steepest plunge. I ate a hot dog and looked around, but Simon was nowhere to be found.

While walking back along the beach, I saw Father lean over and give Aunt Helen a quick kiss on the cheek. Mother had wandered away, and I quickly offered to go find her just to hide the tears of rage in my eyes. I walked up the beach past the place where the two teenagers had drowned the previous weekend. There were a few of the resurrected around. They were sitting near the water with their families; but no sight of Mother. I was thinking of heading back when I thought I noticed some movement under the boardwalk.

It was incredibly dark under there. Narrow strips of light, broken into weird sorts of patterns by the wooden posts and cross-braces, dropped down from cracks in the walkway overhead. Footsteps and rumbles from the mid-way sounded like fists pounding against a coffin lid. I stopped then. I had a sudden image of dozens of them be-ing there in the darkness. Dozens, Mother among them, with thin patterns of light crossing them so that you could make out a hand or shirt or staring eye. But they were not there. Mother was not there. Something else was.

I don't know what made me look up. Footsteps from above. A slight turning, turning; something turning in the shadows. I could see where he had climbed the cross-braces, wedged a sneaker here, lifted himself there to the wide timber. It would not have been hard. We'd climbed like that a thousand times. I stared right into his face, but it was the clothesline I recognized first.

Father quit teaching after Simon's death. He never went back after the sabbatical, and his notes for the Pound book sat stacked in the basement with last year's newspa-pers. The Resurrectionists helped him find a job as a cus-todian in a nearby shopping mall, and he usually didn't get home before two in the morning.

After Christmas I went away to a boarding school that was two states away. The Resurrectionists had opened the Institute by this time, and more and more families were turning to them. I was later able to go to the University on a full scholarship. Despite the covenant, I rarely came home during those years. Father was drunk during my few visits. Once I drank with him and we sat in the kitchen and cried together. His hair was almost gone except for a few white strands on the sides, and his eyes were sunken in a lined face. The alcohol had left innumerable broken blood vessels in his cheeks, and he looked as though he was wearing more makeup than Mother.

Mrs. Hargill called three days before graduation. Father had filled the bath with warm water and then drawn the ra-zor blade up the vein rather than across it. He had read his Plutarch. It had been two days before the housekeeper found him, and when I arrived home the next evening the bathtub was still caked with congealed rings. After

the fu-neral I went through all of his old papers and found a jour-nal he had been keeping for several years. I burned it along with the stacks of notes for his unfinished book.

Our policy with the Institute was honored despite the cir-cumstances, and that helped me through the next few years. My career is more than a job to me—I believe in what I do and I'm good at it. It was my idea to lease some of the empty school buildings for our new neighborhood centers.

Last week I was caught in a traffic jam, and when I inched the car up to the accident site and saw the small figure covered by a blanket and the broken glass every-where, I also noticed that a crowd of *them* had gathered on the curb. There are so many of them these days.

I used to have shares in a condominium in one of the last lighted sections of the city, but when our old house came up for sale I jumped at the chance to buy it. I've kept many of the old furnishings and replaced others so that it's almost the way it used to be. Keeping up an old house like that is expensive, but I don't spend my money foolishly. After work a lot of guys from the Institute go out to bars, but I don't. After I've put away my equipment and scrubbed down the steel tables, I go straight home. My family is there. They're waiting for me.

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