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**STEPHEN  
KING**

**THE TALISMAN**

**PETER  
STRAUB**



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*This book is for  
Ruth King  
Elvena Straub*





Well, when Tom and me got to the edge of the hilltop, we looked away down into the village and could see three or four lights twinkling, where there was sick folks, may be; and stars over us was sparkling ever so fine; and down by the village was the river, a whole mile broad, and awful still and grand.

—MARK TWAIN, *Huckleberry Finn*

My new clothes was all greased up and clayey, and I was dog-tired.

—MARK TWAIN, *Huckleberry Finn*



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# ONE JACK LIGHTS OUT





# 1

## The Alhambra Inn and Gardens

### 1

On September 15th, 1981, a boy named Jack Sawyer stood where the water and land come together, hands in the pockets of his jeans, looking out at the steady Atlantic. He was twelve years old and tall for his age. The sea-breeze swept back his brown hair, probably too long, from a fine, clear brow. He stood there, filled with the confused and painful emotions he had lived with for the last three months—since the time when his mother had closed their house on Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles and, in a flurry of furniture, checks, and real-estate agents, rented an apartment on Central Park West. From that apartment they had fled to this quiet resort on New Hampshire's tiny seacoast. Order and regularity had disappeared from Jack's world. His life seemed as shifting, as uncontrolled, as the heaving water before him. His mother was moving him through the world, twitching him from place to place; but what moved his mother?

His mother was running, running.

Jack turned around, looking up the empty beach first to the left, then to the right. To the left was Arcadia Funworld, an amusement park that ran all racket and roar from Memorial Day to Labor Day. It stood empty and still now, a heart between beats.

#### 4 THE TALISMAN

The roller coaster was a scaffold against that featureless, overcast sky, the uprights and angled supports like strokes done in charcoal. Down there was his new friend, Speedy Parker, but the boy could not think about Speedy Parker now. To the right was the Alhambra Inn and Gardens, and that was where the boy's thoughts relentlessly took him. On the day of their arrival Jack had momentarily thought he'd seen a rainbow over its dormered and gambreled roof. A sign of sorts, a promise of better things. But there had been no rainbow. A weathervane spun right-left, left-right, caught in a crosswind. He had got out of their rented car, ignoring his mother's unspoken desire for him to do something about the luggage, and looked up. Above the spinning brass cock of the weathervane hung only a blank sky.

"Open the trunk and get the bags, sonny boy," his mother had called to him. "This broken-down old actress wants to check in and hunt down a drink."

"An elementary martini," Jack had said.

"You're not so old," you were supposed to say." She was pushing herself effortfully off the carseat.

"You're not so old."

She gleamed at him—a glimpse of the old, go-to-hell Lily Cavanaugh (Sawyer), queen of two decades' worth of B movies. She straightened her back. "It's going to be okay here, Jacky," she had said. "Everything's going to be okay here. This is a good place."

A seagull drifted over the roof of the hotel, and for a second Jack had the disquieting sensation that the weathervane had taken flight.

"We'll get away from the phone calls for a while, right?"

"Sure," Jack had said. She wanted to hide from Uncle Morgan, she wanted no more wrangles with her dead husband's business partner, she wanted to

crawl into bed with an elementary martini and hoist the covers over her head. . . .

*Mom, what's wrong with you?*

There was too much death, the world was half-made of death. The gull cried out overhead.

"Andelay, kid, andelay," his mother had said. "Let's get into the Great Good Place."

Then, Jack had thought: *At least there's always Uncle Tommy to help out in case things get really hairy.*

But Uncle Tommy was already dead; it was just that the news was still on the other end of a lot of telephone wires.

## 2

The Alhambra hung out over the water, a great Victorian pile on gigantic granite blocks which seemed to merge almost seamlessly with the low headland—a jutting collarbone of granite here on the few scant miles of New Hampshire seacoast. The formal gardens on its landward side were barely visible from Jack's beach-front angle—a dark green flip of hedge, that was all. The brass cock stood against the sky, quartering west by northwest. A plaque in the lobby announced that it was here, in 1838, that the Northern Methodist Conference had held the first of the great New England abolition rallies. Daniel Webster had spoken at fiery, inspired length. According to the plaque, Webster had said: "From this day forward, know that slavery as an American institution has begun to sicken and must soon die in all our states and territorial lands."

## 3

So they had arrived, on that day last week which had ended the turmoil of their months in New York. In

## 6 THE TALISMAN

Arcadia Beach there were no lawyers employed by Morgan Sloat popping out of cars and waving papers which had to be signed, *had* to be filed, Mrs. Sawyer. In Arcadia Beach the telephones did not ring out from noon until three in the morning (Uncle Morgan appeared to forget that residents of Central Park West were not on California time). In fact the telephones in Arcadia Beach rang not at all.

On the way into the little resort town, his mother driving with squinty-eyed concentration, Jack had seen only one person on the streets—a mad old man desultorily pushing an empty shopping cart along a sidewalk. Above them was that blank gray sky, an uncomfortable sky. In total contrast to New York, here there was only the steady sound of the wind, hooting up deserted streets that looked much too wide with no traffic to fill them. Here were empty shops with signs in the windows saying OPEN WEEK-ENDS ONLY or, even worse, SEE YOU IN JUNE! There were a hundred empty parking places on the street before the Alhambra, empty tables in the Arcadia Tea and Jam Shoppe next door.

And shabby-crazy old men pushed shopping carts along deserted streets.

“I spent the happiest three weeks of my life in this funny little place,” Lily told him, driving past the old man (who turned, Jack saw, to look after them with frightened suspicion—he was mouthing something but Jack could not tell what it was) and then swinging the car up the curved drive through the front gardens of the hotel.

For that was why they had bundled everything they could not live without into suitcases and satchels and plastic shopping bags, turned the key in the lock on the apartment door (ignoring the shrill ringing of the telephone, which seemed to penetrate that

same keyhole and pursue them down the hall); that was why they had filled the trunk and back seat of the rented car with all their overflowing boxes and bags and spent hours crawling north along the Henry Hudson Parkway, then many more hours pounding up I-95—because Lily Cavanaugh Sawyer had once been happy here. In 1968, the year before Jack’s birth, Lily had been nominated for an Academy Award for her role in a picture called *Blaze*. *Blaze* was a better movie than most of Lily’s, and in it she had been able to demonstrate a much richer talent than her usual bad-girl roles had revealed. Nobody expected Lily to win, least of all Lily; but for Lily the customary cliché about the real honor being in the nomination was honest truth—she did feel honored, deeply and genuinely, and to celebrate this one moment of real professional recognition, Phil Sawyer had wisely taken her for three weeks to the Alhambra Inn and Gardens, on the other side of the continent, where they had watched the Oscars while drinking champagne in bed. (If Jack had been older, and had he had an occasion to care, he might have done the necessary subtraction and discovered that the Alhambra had been the place of his essential beginning.)

When the Supporting Actress nominations were read, according to family legend, Lily had growled to Phil, “If I win this thing and I’m not there, I’ll do the Monkey on your chest in my *stiletto heels*.”

But when Ruth Gordon had won, Lily had said, “Sure, she deserves it, she’s a great kid.” And had immediately poked her husband in the middle of the chest and said, “You’d better get me another part like that, you big-shot agent you.”

There had been no more parts like that. Lily’s last role, two years after Phil’s death, had been that

## 8 THE TALISMAN

of a cynical ex-prostitute in a film called *Motorcycle Maniacs*.

It was that period Lily was commemorating now, Jack knew as he hauled the baggage out of the trunk and the back seat. A D'Agostino bag had torn right down through the big D'AG, and a jumble of rolled-up socks, loose photographs, chessmen and the board, and comic books had dribbled over all else in the trunk. Jack managed to get most of this stuff into other bags. Lily was moving slowly up the hotel steps, pulling herself along on the railing like an old lady. "I'll find the bellhop," she said without turning around.

Jack straightened up from the bulging bags and looked again at the sky where he was sure he had seen a rainbow. There was no rainbow, only that uncomfortable, shifting sky.

Then:

"Come to me," someone said behind him in a small and perfectly audible voice.

"What?" he asked, turning around. The empty gardens and drive stretched out before him.

"Yes?" his mother said. She looked crickle-backed, leaning over the knob of the great wooden door.

"Mistake," he said. There had been no voice, no rainbow. He forgot both and looked up at his mother, who was struggling with the vast door. "Hold on, I'll help," he called, and trotted up the steps, awkwardly carrying a big suitcase and a straining paper bag filled with sweaters.

## 4

Until he met Speedy Parker, Jack had moved through the days at the hotel as unconscious of the passage of time as a sleeping dog. His entire life seemed almost

dreamlike to him during these days, full of shadows and inexplicable transitions. Even the terrible news about Uncle Tommy which had come down the telephone wires the night before had not entirely awakened him, as shocking as it had been. If Jack had been a mystic, he might have thought that other forces had taken him over and were manipulating his mother's life and his own. Jack Sawyer at twelve was a being who required things to do, and the noiseless passivity of these days, after the hubbub of Manhattan, had confused and undone him in some basic way.

Jack had found himself standing on the beach with no recollection of having gone there, no idea of what he was doing there at all. He supposed he was mourning Uncle Tommy, but it was as though his mind had gone to sleep, leaving his body to fend for itself. He could not concentrate long enough to grasp the plots of the sitcoms he and Lily watched at night, much less keep the nuances of fiction in his head.

"You're tired from all this moving around," his mother said, dragging deeply on a cigarette and squinting at him through the smoke. "All you have to do, Jack-O, is relax for a little while. This is a good place. Let's enjoy it as long as we can."

Bob Newhart, before them in a slightly too-reddish color on the set, bemusedly regarded a shoe he held in his right hand.

"That's what I'm doing, Jacky." She smiled at him. "Relaxing and enjoying it."

He peeked at his watch. Two hours had passed while they sat in front of the television, and he could not remember anything that had preceded this program.

Jack was getting up to go to bed when the phone rang. Good old Uncle Morgan Sloat had found them. Uncle Morgan's news was never very great,

## 10 THE TALISMAN

but this was apparently a blockbuster even by Uncle Morgan's standards. Jack stood in the middle of the room, watching as his mother's face grew paler, palest. Her hand crept to her throat, where new lines had appeared over the last few months, and pressed lightly. She said barely a word until the end, when she whispered, "Thank you, Morgan," and hung up. She had turned to Jack then, looking older and sicker than ever.

"Got to be tough now, Jacky, all right?"

He hadn't felt tough.

She took his hand then and told him.

"Uncle Tommy was killed in a hit-and-run accident this afternoon, Jack."

He gasped, feeling as if the wind had been torn out of him.

"He was crossing La Cienega Boulevard and a van hit him. There was a witness who said it was black, and that the words WILD CHILD were written on the side, but that was . . . was all."

Lily began to cry. A moment later, almost surprised, Jack began to cry as well. All of that had happened three days ago, and to Jack it seemed forever.

## 5

On September 15th, 1981, a boy named Jack Sawyer stood looking out at the steady water as he stood on an unmarked beach before a hotel that looked like a castle in a Sir Walter Scott novel. He wanted to cry but was unable to release his tears. He was surrounded by death, death made up half the world, there were no rainbows. The WILD CHILD van had subtracted Uncle Tommy from the world. Uncle Tommy, dead in L.A., too far from the east coast, where even a kid like Jack knew he really belonged. A man who felt



he had to put on a tie before going out to get a roast beef sandwich at Arby's had no business on the west coast at all.

His father was dead, Uncle Tommy was dead, his mother might be dying. He felt death here, too, at Arcadia Beach, where it spoke through telephones in Uncle Morgan's voice. It was nothing as cheap or obvious as the melancholy feel of a resort in the off-season, where one kept stumbling over the Ghosts of Summers Past; it seemed to be in the texture of things, a smell on the ocean breeze. He was scared . . . and he had been scared for a long time. Being here, where it was so quiet, had only helped him to realize it—had helped him to realize that maybe Death had driven all the way up I-95 from New York, squinting out through cigarette smoke and asking him to find some bop on the car radio.

He could remember—vaguely—his father telling him that he was born with an old head, but his head didn't feel old now. Right now, his head felt very young. *Scared*, he thought. *I'm pretty damn scared. This is where the world ends, right?*

Seagulls coursed the gray air overhead. The silence was as gray as the air—as deadly as the growing circles under her eyes.

## 6

When he had wandered into Funworld and met Lester Speedy Parker after he did not quite know how many days of numbly drifting through time, that passive feeling of being *on hold* had somehow left him. Lester Parker was a black man with crinkly gray hair and heavy lines cutting through his cheeks. He was utterly unremarkable now despite whatever he had accomplished in his earlier life as a travelling blues musician.

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Nor had he said anything particularly remarkable. Yet as soon as Jack had walked aimlessly into Funworld's game arcade and met Speedy's pale eyes he felt all the fuzziness leave him. He had become himself again. It was as if a magical current had passed directly from the old man into Jack. Speedy had smiled at him and said, "Well, it looks like I got me some company. Little travellin man just walked in."

It was true, he was not *on hold* anymore: just an instant before, he had seemed to be wrapped in wet wool and cotton candy, and now he was set free. A silvery nimbus seemed to play about the old man for an instant, a little aureole of light which disappeared as soon as Jack blinked. For the first time Jack saw that the man was holding the handle of a wide heavy push-broom.

"You okay, son?" The handyman put one hand in the small of his back, and stretched backward. "The world just get worse, or did she get better?"

"Uh, better," Jack said.

"Then you come to the right place, I'd say. What do they call you?"

*Little travellin man*, Speedy had said that first day, *ole Travellin Jack*. He had leaned his tall angular body against the Skee-Ball machine and wrapped his arms around the broom-handle as though it were a girl at a dance. *The man you see here is Lester Speedy Parker, formerly a travellin man hisself, son, hee hee—oh yeah, Speedy knew the road, he knew all the roads, way back in the old days. Had me a band, Travellin Jack, played the blues. Guitar blues. Made me a few records, too, but I won't shame you by asking if you ever heard em.* Every syllable had its own rhythmic lilt, every phrase its rimshot and backbeat; Speedy Parker carried a broom instead of a guitar, but he was still a musician. Within the first five seconds of talking to Speedy, Jack had known that

his jazz-loving father would have relished this man's company.

He had tagged along behind Speedy for the better part of three or four days, watching him work and helping out when he could. Speedy let him bang in nails, sand down a picket or two that needed paint; these simple tasks done under Speedy's instructions were the only schooling he was getting, but they made him feel better. Jack now saw his first days in Arcadia Beach as a period of unrelieved wretchedness from which his new friend had rescued him. For Speedy Parker was a friend, that was certain—so certain, in fact, that in it was a quantity of mystery. In the few days since Jack had shaken off his daze (or since Speedy had shaken it off for him by dispelling it with one glance of his light-colored eyes), Speedy Parker had become closer to him than any other friend, with the possible exception of Richard Sloat, whom Jack had known approximately since the cradle. And now, counteracting his terror at losing Uncle Tommy and his fear that his mother was actually dying, he felt the tug of Speedy's warm wise presence from just down the street.

Again, and uncomfortably, Jack had his old sense of *being directed*, of being manipulated: as if a long invisible wire had pulled himself and his mother up to this abandoned place by the sea.

They wanted him here, whoever *they* were.

Or was that just crazy? In his inner vision he saw a bent old man, clearly out of his mind, muttering to himself as he pushed an empty shopping cart down the sidewalk.

A gull screamed in the air, and Jack promised himself that he would *make* himself talk about some of his feelings with Speedy Parker. Even if Speedy thought he was nuts; even if he laughed at Jack. He would

not laugh, Jack secretly knew. They were old friends because one of the things Jack understood about the old custodian was that he could say almost anything to him.

But he was not ready for all that yet. It was all too crazy, and he did not understand it yet himself. Almost reluctantly Jack turned his back on Funworld and trudged across the sand toward the hotel.

## 2

# The Funnel Opens

### 1

It was a day later, but Jack Sawyer was no wiser. He *had*, however, had one of the greatest nightmares of all time last night. In it, some terrible creature had been coming for his mother—a dwarfish monstrosity with misplaced eyes and rotting, cheesy skin. “*Your mother’s almost dead, Jack, can you say hallelujah?*” this monstrosity had croaked, and Jack knew—the way you knew things in dreams—that it was radioactive, and that if it touched him, he would die, too. He had awakened with his body drenched in sweat, on the edge of a bitter scream. It took the steady pounding of the surf to reacquaint him with where he was, and it was hours before he could go back to sleep.

He had meant to tell his mother about the dream this morning, but Lily had been sour and uncommunicative, hiding in a cloud of cigarette smoke. It was only as he started out of the hotel coffee shop on some trumped-up errand that she smiled at him a little.

“Think about what you want to eat tonight.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Anything but fast food. I did not come all the way from L.A. to New Hampshire in order to poison myself with hotdogs.”

“Let’s try one of those seafood places in Hampton Beach,” Jack said.

“Fine. Go on and play.”

*Go on and play*, Jack thought with a bitterness utterly unlike him. *Oh yeah, Mom, way to go. Too cool. Go on and play. With who? Mom, why are you here? Why are we here? How sick are you? How come you won’t talk to me about Uncle Tommy? What’s Uncle Morgan up to? What—*

Questions, questions. And not one of them worth a darned thing, because there was no one to answer them.

*Unless Speedy—*

But that was ridiculous; how could one old black man he’d just met solve any of his problems?

Still, the thought of Speedy Parker danced at the edge of his mind as Jack ambled across the boardwalk and down to the depressingly empty beach.

## 2

*This is where the world ends, right?* Jack thought again.

Seagulls coursed the gray air overhead. The calendar said it was still summer, but summer ended here at Arcadia Beach on Labor Day. The silence was gray as the air.

He looked down at his sneakers and saw that there was some sort of tarry goo on them. *Beach crud*, he thought. *Some kind of pollution*. He had no idea where he had picked it up and he stepped back from the edge of the water, uneasy.

The gulls in the air, swooping and crying. One of them screamed overhead and he heard a flat cracking that was almost metallic. He turned in time to see it

come in for a fluttering, awkward landing on a hump of rock. The gull turned its head in rapid, almost robotic movements, as if to verify it was alone, and then it hopped down to where the clam it had dropped lay on the smooth, hard-packed sand. The clam had cracked open like an egg and Jack saw raw meat inside, still twitching . . . or perhaps that was his imagination.

*Don't want to see this.*

But before he could turn away, the gull's yellow, hooked beak was pulling at the meat, stretching it like a rubber band, and he felt his stomach knot into a slick fist. In his mind he could hear that stretched tissue screaming—nothing coherent, only stupid flesh crying out in pain.

He tried to look away from the seagull again and he couldn't. The gull's beak opened, giving him a brief glimpse of dirty pink gullet. The clam snapped back into its cracked shell and for a moment the gull was looking at him, its eyes a deadly black, confirming every horrible truth: fathers die, mothers die, uncles die even if they went to Yale and look as solid as bank walls in their three-piece Savile Row suits. Kids die too, maybe . . . and at the end all there may be is the stupid, unthinking scream of living tissue.

"Hey," Jack said aloud, not aware he was doing anything but thinking inside his own head. "Hey, give me a break."

The gull sat over its catch, regarding him with its beady black eyes. Then it began to dig at the meat again. *Want some, Jack? It's still twitching! By God, it's so fresh it hardly knows it's dead!*

The strong yellow beak hooked into the meat again and pulled. *Strettttchhhhhh—*

It snapped. The gull's head went up toward the gray September sky and its throat worked. And again it seemed to be looking at him, the way the eyes in

some pictures seemed always to look at you no matter where you went in the room. And the eyes . . . he knew those eyes.

Suddenly he wanted his mother—her dark blue eyes. He could not remember wanting her with such desperation since he had been very, very small. *La-la*, he heard her sing inside his head, and her voice was the wind's voice, here for now, somewhere else all too soon. *La-la, sleep now, Jacky, baby-bunting, daddy's gone a-hunting. And all that jazz.* Memories of being rocked, his mother smoking one Herbert Tareyton after another, maybe looking at a script—blue pages, she called them, he remembered that: blue pages. *La-la, Jacky, all is cool. I love you, Jacky. Shhh . . . sleep. La-la.*

The gull was looking at him.

With sudden horror that engorged his throat like hot salt water he saw *it really was looking at him*. Those black eyes (*whose?*) were *seeing* him. And he knew that look.

A raw strand of flesh still dangled from the gull's beak. As he looked, the gull sucked it in. Its beak opened in a weird but unmistakable grin.

He turned then and ran, head down, eyes shut against the hot salt tears, sneakers digging against the sand, and if there was a way to go up, go up and up, up to some gull's-eye view, one would have seen only him, only his tracks, in all that gray day; Jack Sawyer, twelve and alone, running back toward the inn, Speedy Parker forgotten, his voice nearly lost in tears and wind, crying the negative over and over again: *no* and *no* and *no*.

### 3

He paused at the top of the beach, out of breath. A hot stitch ran up his left side from the middle of his

ribs to the deepest part of his armpit. He sat down on one of the benches the town put out for old people and pushed his hair out of his eyes.

*Got to get control of yourself. If Sergeant Fury goes Section Eight, who's gonna lead the Howling Commandos?*

He smiled and actually did feel a little better. From up here, fifty feet from the water, things looked a little better. Maybe it was the change in barometric pressure, or something. What had happened to Uncle Tommy was horrible, but he supposed he would get over it, learn to accept. That was what his mother said, anyway. Uncle Morgan had been unusually pesty just lately, but then, Uncle Morgan had *always* been sort of a pest.

As for his mother . . . well, that was the big one, wasn't it?

Actually, he thought, sitting on the bench and digging at the verge of the sand beyond the boardwalk with one toe, actually his mother might still be all right. She *could* be all right; it was certainly *possible*. After all, no one had come right out and *said* it was the big C, had they? No. If she had cancer, she wouldn't have brought him here, would she? More likely they'd be in Switzerland, with his mother taking cold mineral baths and scoffing goat-glands, or something. And she would do it, too.

So maybe—

A low, dry whispering sound intruded on his consciousness. He looked down and his eyes widened. The sand had begun to move by the instep of his left sneaker. The fine white grains were sliding around in a small circle perhaps a finger's length in diameter. The sand in the middle of this circle suddenly collapsed, so that now there was a dimple in the sand. It was maybe two inches deep. The sides of this dimple



were also in motion: around and around, moving in rapid counterclockwise circuits.

*Not real*, he told himself immediately, but his heart began to speed up again. His breathing also began to come faster. *Not real*, it's one of the Daydreams, that's all, or maybe it's a crab or something . . .

But it wasn't a crab and it wasn't one of the Daydreams—this was not the other place, the one he dreamed about when things were boring or maybe a little scary, and it sure as hell wasn't any crab.

The sand spun faster, the sound arid and dry, making him think of static electricity, of an experiment they had done in science last year with a Leyden jar. But more than either of these, the minute sound was like a long lunatic gasp, the final breath of a dying man.

More sand collapsed inward and began to spin. Now it was not a dimple; it was a funnel in the sand, a kind of reverse dustdevil. The bright yellow of a gum wrapper was revealed, covered, revealed, covered, revealed again—each time it showed up again. Jack could read more of it as the funnel grew: JU, then JUI, then JUICY F. The funnel grew and the sand was jerked away from the gum wrapper again. It was as quick and rude as an unfriendly hand jerking down the covers on a made bed. JUICY FRUIT, he read, and then the wrapper flapped upward.

The sand turned faster and faster, in a hissing fury. *Hbbbbbhaaaaabbbbbb* was the sound the sand made. Jack stared at it, fascinated at first, and then horrified. The sand was opening like a large dark eye: it was the eye of the gull that had dropped the clam on the rock and then pulled the living meat out of it like a rubber band.

*Hbbbbbhaaaaabbbbbb*, the sand-spout mocked in its dead, dry voice. That was not a mind-voice. No mat-

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ter how much Jack wished it were only in his head, that voice was real. *His false teeth flew, Jack, when the old WILD CHILD hit him, out they went, rattledy-bang! Yale or no Yale, when the old WILD CHILD van comes and knocks your false teeth out, Jacky, you got to go. And your mother—*

Then he was running again, blindly, not looking back, his hair blown off his forehead, his eyes wide and terrified.

### 4

Jack walked as quickly as he could through the dim lobby of the hotel. All the atmosphere of the place forbade running: it was as quiet as a library, and the gray light which fell through the tall mullioned windows softened and blurred the already faded carpets. Jack broke into a trot as he passed the desk, and the stooped ashen-skinned day-clerk chose that second to emerge through an arched wooden passage. The clerk said nothing, but his permanent scowl dragged the corners of his mouth another centimeter downward. It was like being caught running in church. Jack wiped his sleeve across his forehead, made himself walk the rest of the way to the elevators. He punched the button, feeling the desk clerk's frown burning between his shoulder blades. The only time this week that Jack had seen the desk clerk smile had been when the man had recognized his mother. The smile had met only the minimum standards for graciousness.

"I suppose that's how old you have to be to remember Lily Cavanaugh," she had said to Jack as soon as they were alone in their rooms. There had been a time, and not so long ago, when being identified, recognized from any one of the fifty movies she

had made during the fifties and sixties (“Queen of the Bs,” they called her; her own comment: “Darling of the Drive-ins”)—whether by a cabdriver, waiter, or the lady selling blouses at the Wilshire Boulevard Saks—perked her mood for hours. Now even that simple pleasure had gone dry for her.

Jack jiggled before the unmoving elevator doors, hearing an impossible and familiar voice lifting to him from a whirling funnel of sand. For a second he saw Thomas Woodbine, solid comfortable Uncle Tommy Woodbine, who was supposed to have been one of his guardians—a strong wall against trouble and confusion—crumpled and dead on La Cienega Boulevard, his teeth like popcorn twenty feet away in the gutter. He stabbed the button again.

*Hurry up!*

Then he saw something worse—his mother hauled into a waiting car by two impassive men. Suddenly Jack had to urinate. He flattened his palm against the button, and the bent gray man behind the desk uttered a phlegmy sound of disapproval. Jack pressed the edge of his other hand into that magic place just beneath his stomach which lessened the pressure on his bladder. Now he could hear the slow whir of the descending elevator. He closed his eyes, squeezed his legs together. His mother looked uncertain, lost and confused, and the men forced her into the car as easily as they would a weary collie dog. But that was not really happening, he knew; it was a memory—part of it must have been one of the Daydreams—and it had happened not to his mother but to him.

As the mahogany doors of the elevator slid away to reveal a shadowy interior from which his own face met him in a foxed and peeling mirror, that scene from his seventh year wrapped around him once

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again, and he saw one man's eyes turn to yellow, felt the other's hand alter into something clawlike, hard and inhuman . . . he jumped into the elevator as if he had been jabbed with a fork.

Not possible: the Daydreams were not possible, he had *not* seen a man's eyes turning from blue to yellow, and his mother was fine and dandy, there was nothing to be scared of, nobody was dying, and danger was what a seagull meant to a clam. He closed his eyes and the elevator toiled upward.

That thing in the sand had laughed at him.

Jack squeezed through the opening as soon as the doors began to part. He trotted past the closed mouths of the other elevators, turned right into the panelled corridor and ran past the sconces and paintings toward their rooms. Here running seemed less a sacrilege. They had 407 and 408, consisting of two bedrooms, a small kitchen, and a living room with a view of the long smooth beach and the vastness of the ocean. His mother had appropriated flowers from somewhere, arranged them in vases, and set her little array of framed photographs beside them. Jack at five, Jack at eleven, Jack as an infant in the arms of his father. His father, Philip Sawyer, at the wheel of the old DeSoto he and Morgan Sloat had driven to California in the unimaginable days when they had been so poor they had often slept in the car.

When Jack threw open 408, the door to the living room, he called out, "Mom? Mom?"

The flowers met him, the photographs smiled; there was no answer. "Mom!" The door swung shut behind him. Jack felt his stomach go cold. He rushed through the living room to the large bedroom on the right. "*Mom!*" Another vase of tall bright flowers. The empty bed looked starched and ironed, so

stiff a quarter would bounce off the quilt. On the bedside table stood an assortment of brown bottles containing vitamins and other pills. Jack backed out. His mother's window showed black waves rolling and rolling toward him.

Two men getting out of a nondescript car, themselves nondescript, reaching for her . . .

"Mom!" he shouted.

"I hear you, Jack," came his mother's voice through the bathroom door. "What on earth . . . ?"

"Oh," he said, and felt all his muscles relax. "Oh, sorry. I just didn't know where you were."

"Taking a bath," she said. "Getting ready for dinner. Is that still allowed?"

Jack realized that he no longer had to go to the bathroom. He dropped into one of the overstuffed chairs and closed his eyes in relief. She was still okay—

*Still okay for now*, a dark voice whispered, and in his mind he saw that sand funnel open again, whirling.

## 5

Seven or eight miles up the coast road, just outside Hampton Township, they found a restaurant called The Lobster Chateau. Jack had given a very sketchy account of his day—already he was backing away from the terror he had experienced on the beach, letting it diminish in his memory. A waiter in a red jacket printed with the yellow image of a lobster across the back showed them to a table beside a long streaky window.

"Would Madam care for a drink?" The waiter had a stony-cold off-season New England face, and looking at it, suspecting the resentment of his Ralph Lauren sport coat and his mother's carelessly worn Halston

afternoon dress behind those watery blue eyes, Jack felt a more familiar terror needle him—simple homesickness. *Mom, if you're not really sick, what the hell are we doing here? The place is empty! It's creepy! Jesus!*

"Bring me an elementary martini," she said.

The waiter raised his eyebrows. "Madam?"

"Ice in a glass," she said. "Olive on ice. Tanqueray gin over olive. Then—are you getting this?"

*Mom, for God's sake, can't you see his eyes? You think you're being charming—he thinks you're making fun of him! Can't you see his eyes?*

No. She couldn't. And that failure of empathy, when she had always been so sharp about how other people were feeling, was another stone against his heart. She was withdrawing . . . in all ways.

"Yes, madam."

"Then," she said, "you take a bottle of vermouth—any brand—and hold it against the glass. Then you put the vermouth back on the shelf and bring the glass to me. 'Kay?'"

"Yes, madam." Watery-cold New England eyes, staring at his mother with no love at all. *We're alone here*, Jack thought, really realizing it for the first time. *Jeez, are we.* "Young sir?"

"I'd like a Coke," Jack said miserably.

The waiter left. Lily rummaged in her purse, came up with a package of Herbert Tarrytoons (so she had called them since he had been a baby, as in "Bring me my Tarrytoons from over there on the shelf, Jacky," and so he still thought of them) and lit one. She coughed out smoke in three harsh bursts.

It was another stone against his heart. Two years ago, his mother had given up smoking entirely. Jack had waited for her to backslide with that queer fatalism which is the flip side of childish credulity and innocence. His mother had always smoked; she

would soon smoke again. But she had not . . . not until three months ago, in New York. Carltons. Walking around the living room in the apartment on Central Park West, puffing like a choo-choo, or squatting in front of the record cabinet, pawing through her old rock records or her dead husband's old jazz records.

"You smoking again, Mom?" he'd asked her.

"Yeah, I'm smoking cabbage leaves," she'd said.

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Why don't you turn on the TV?" she'd responded with uncharacteristic sharpness, turning toward him, her lips pressed tightly together. "Maybe you can find Jimmy Swaggart or Reverend Ike. Get down there in the hallelujah corner with the amen sisters."

"Sorry," he'd muttered.

Well—it was only Carltons. Cabbage leaves. But here were the Herbert Tarrytoons—the blue-and-white old-fashioned pack, the mouthpieces that looked like filters but which weren't. He could remember, vaguely, his father telling somebody that he smoked Winstons and his wife smoked Black Lungers.

"See anything weird, Jack?" she asked him now, her overbright eyes fixed on him, the cigarette held in its old, slightly eccentric position between the second and third fingers of the right hand. Daring him to say something. Daring him to say, "Mom, I notice you're smoking Herbert Tarrytoons again—does this mean you figure you don't have anything left to lose?"

"No," he said. That miserable, bewildered homesickness swept him again, and he felt like weeping. "Except this place. *It's* a little weird."

She looked around and grinned. Two other waiters, one fat, one thin, both in red jackets with golden lobsters on the back, stood by the swing doors to the kitchen, talking quietly. A velvet rope hung across the entrance to a huge dining room beyond the alcove

where Jack and his mother sat. Chairs were overturned in ziggurat shapes on the tables in this dark cave. At the far end, a huge window-wall looked out on a gothic shorescape that made Jack think of *Death's Darling*, a movie his mother had been in. She had played a young woman with a lot of money who married a dark and handsome stranger against her parents' wishes. The dark and handsome stranger took her to a big house by the ocean and tried to drive her crazy. *Death's Darling* had been more or less typical of Lily Cavanaugh's career—she had starred in a lot of black-and-white films in which handsome but forgettable actors drove around in Ford convertibles with their hats on.

The sign hanging from the velvet rope barring the entrance to this dark cavern was ludicrously understated: THIS SECTION CLOSED.

"It is a little grim, isn't it?" she said.

"It's like the Twilight Zone," he replied, and she barked her harsh, infectious, somehow lovely laugh.

"Yeah, Jacky, Jacky, Jacky," she said, and leaned over to ruffle his too-long hair, smiling.

He pushed her hand away, also smiling (but oh, her fingers felt like bones, didn't they? *She's almost dead, Jack . . .*). "Don't touch-a da moichendise."

"Off my case."

"Pretty hip for an old bag."

"Oh boy, try to get movie money out of me this week."

"Yeah."

They smiled at each other, and Jack could not ever remember a need to cry so badly, or remember loving her so much. There was a kind of desperate toughness about her now . . . going back to the Black Lungers was part of that.

Their drinks came. She tipped her glass toward his. "Us."



“Okay.”

They drank. The waiter came with menus.

“Did I pull his string a little hard before, Jacky?”

“Maybe a little,” he said.

She thought about it, then shrugged it away.

“What are you having?”

“Sole, I guess.”

“Make it two.”

So he ordered for both of them, feeling clumsy and embarrassed but knowing it was what she wanted—and he could see in her eyes when the waiter left that he hadn’t done too bad a job. A lot of that was Uncle Tommy’s doing. After a trip to Hardee’s Uncle Tommy had said: “I think there’s hope for you, Jack, if we can just cure this revolting obsession with processed yellow cheese.”

The food came. He wolfed his sole, which was hot and lemony and good. Lily only toyed with hers, ate a few green beans, and then pushed things around on her plate.

“School started up here two weeks ago,” Jack announced halfway through the meal. Seeing the big yellow buses with ARCADIA DISTRICT SCHOOLS written on the sides had made him feel guilty—under the circumstances he thought that was probably absurd, but there it was. He was playing hooky.

She looked at him, enquiring. She had ordered and finished a second drink; now the waiter brought a third.

Jack shrugged. “Just thought I’d mention it.”

“Do you want to go?”

“Huh? No! Not here!”

“Good,” she said. “Because I don’t have your god-dam vaccination papers. They won’t let you in school without a pedigree, chum.”

"Don't call me chum," Jack said, but Lily didn't crack a smile at the old joke.

*Boy, why ain't you in school?*

He blinked as if the voice had spoken aloud instead of only in his mind.

"Something?" she asked.

"No. Well . . . there's a guy at the amusement park. Funworld. Janitor, caretaker, something like that. An old black guy. He asked me why I wasn't in school."

She leaned forward, no humor in her now, almost frighteningly grim. "What did you tell him?"

Jack shrugged. "I said I was getting over mono. You remember that time Richard had it? The doctor told Uncle Morgan Richard had to stay out of school for six weeks, but he could walk around outside and everything." Jack smiled a little. "I thought he was lucky."

Lily relaxed a little. "I don't like you talking to strangers, Jack."

"Mom, he's just a—"

"I don't care *who* he is. I don't want you talking to strangers."

Jack thought of the black man, his hair gray steel wool, his dark face deeply lined, his odd, light-colored eyes. He had been pushing a broom in the big arcade on the pier—the arcade was the only part of Arcadia Funworld that stayed open the year around, but it had been deserted then except for Jack and the black man and two old men far in the back. The two were playing Skee-Ball in apathetic silence.

But now, sitting here in this slightly creepy restaurant with his mother, it wasn't the black man who asked the question; it was himself.

*Why aren't I in school?*

*It be just like she say, son. Got no vaccination, got no*

*pedigree. You think she come down here with your birth certificate? That what you think? She on the run, son, and you on the run with her. You—*

“Have you heard from Richard?” she broke in, and when she said it, it came to him—no, that was too gentle. It crashed into him. His hands twitched and his glass fell off the table. It shattered on the floor.

*She’s almost dead, Jack.*

The voice from the swirling sand-funnel. The one he had heard in his mind.

It had been Uncle Morgan’s voice. Not maybe, not almost, not sorta like. It had been a *real* voice. The voice of Richard’s father.

## 6

Going home in the car, she asked him, “What happened to you in there, Jack?”

“Nothing. My heart did this funny little Gene Krupa riff.” He ran off a quick one on the dashboard to demonstrate. “Threw a PCV, just like on *General Hospital*.”

“Don’t wise off to me, Jacky.” In the glow of the dashboard instruments she looked pale and haggard. A cigarette smouldered between the second and third fingers of her right hand. She was driving very slowly—never over forty—as she always drove when she’d had too much to drink. Her seat was pulled all the way forward, her skirt was hiked up so her knees floated, storklike, on either side of the steering column, and her chin seemed to hang over the wheel. For a moment she looked haglike, and Jack quickly looked away.

“I’m not,” he mumbled.

“What?”

"I'm not wising off," he said. "It was like a twitch, that's all. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," she said. "I thought it was something about Richard Sloat."

"No." *His father talked to me out of a hole in the sand down on the beach, that's all. In my head he talked to me, like in a movie where you hear a voice-over. He told me you were almost dead.*

"Do you miss him, Jack?"

"Who, Richard?"

"No—Spiro Agnew. Of course Richard."

"Sometimes." Richard Sloat was now going to school in Illinois—one of those private schools where chapel was compulsory and no one had acne.

"You'll see him." She ruffled his hair.

"Mom, are you all right?" The words burst out of him. He could feel his fingers biting into his thighs.

"Yes," she said, lighting another cigarette (she slowed down to twenty to do it; an old pick-up swept by them, its horn blatting). "Never better."

"How much weight have you lost?"

"Jacky, you can never be too thin or too rich." She paused and then smiled at him. It was a tired, hurt smile that told him all the truth he needed to know.

"Mom—"

"No more," she said. "All's well. Take my word for it. See if you can find us some be-bop on the FM."

"But—"

"Find us some bop, Jacky, and shut up."

He found some jazz on a Boston station—an alto saxophone elucidating "All the Things You Are." But under it, a steady, senseless counterpoint, was the ocean. And later, he could see the great skeleton of the roller coaster against the sky. And the rambling wings of the Alhambra Inn. If this was home, they were home.

# 3

## Speedy Parker

### 1

The next day the sun was back—a hard bright sun that layered itself like paint over the flat beach and the slanting, red-tiled strip of roof Jack could see from his bedroom window. A long low wave far out in the water seemed to harden in the light and sent a spear of brightness straight toward his eyes. To Jack this sunlight felt different from the light in California. It seemed somehow thinner, colder, less nourishing. The wave out in the dark ocean melted away, then hoisted itself up again, and a hard dazzling streak of gold leaped across it. Jack turned away from his window. He had already showered and dressed, and his body's clock told him that it was time to start moving toward the schoolbus stop. Seven-fifteen. But of course he would not go to school today, nothing was normal anymore, and he and his mother would just drift like ghosts through another twelve hours of daytime. No schedule, no responsibilities, no homework . . . no order at all except for that given them by mealtimes.

Was today even a schoolday? Jack stopped short beside his bed, feeling a little flicker of panic that his world had become so formless . . . he didn't *think* this was a Saturday. Jack counted back to the first absolutely identifiable day his memory could find, which was the previous Sunday. Counting forward made it Thursday. On Thursdays he had computer class with Mr. Balgo and an early sports period. At least that was what he'd had when his life had been normal, a time

that now seemed—though it had come to an end only months ago—irretrievably lost.

He wandered out of his bedroom into the living room. When he tugged at the drawstring for the curtains the hard bright light flooded into the room, bleaching the furniture. Then he punched the button on the television set and dropped himself onto the stiff couch. His mother would not be up for at least another fifteen minutes. Maybe longer, considering that she'd had three drinks with dinner the night before.

Jack glanced toward the door to his mother's room.

Twenty minutes later he rapped softly at her door. "Mom?" A thick mumble answered him. Jack pushed the door open a crack and looked in. She was lifting her head off the pillow and peering back through half-closed eyes.

"Jacky. Morning. What time?"

"Around eight."

"God. You starving?" She sat up and pressed the palms of her hands to her eyes.

"Kind of. I'm sort of sick of sitting in here. I just wondered if you were getting up soon."

"Not if I can help it. You mind? Go down to the dining room, get some breakfast. Mess around on the beach, okay? You'll have a much better mother today if you give her another hour in bed."

"Sure," he said. "Okay. See you later."

Her head had already dropped back down on the pillow.

Jack switched off the television and let himself out of the room after making sure his key was in the pocket of his jeans.

The elevator smelled of camphor and ammonia—a maid had tipped a bottle off a cart. The doors opened, and the gray desk clerk frowned at him and ostentatiously turned away. Being a movie star's brat doesn't

make you anything special around here, sonny . . . and why aren't you in school? Jack turned into the panelled entrance to the dining room—The Saddle of Lamb—and saw rows of empty tables in a shadowy vastness. Perhaps six had been set up. A waitress in a white blouse and red ruffled skirt looked at him, then looked away. Two exhausted-looking old people sat across a table from each other at the other end of the room. There were no other breakfasters. As Jack looked on, the old man leaned over the table and unselfconsciously cut his wife's fried egg into four-inch square sections.

"Table for one?" The woman in charge of The Saddle of Lamb during the day had materialized beside him, and was already plucking a menu off a stack beside the reservation book.

"Changed my mind, sorry." Jack escaped.

The Alhambra's coffee shop, The Beachcomber Lounge, lay all the way across the lobby and down a long bleak corridor lined with empty display cases. His hunger died at the thought of sitting by himself at the counter and watching the bored cook slap down strips of bacon on the crusty grill. He would wait until his mother got up: or, better yet, he would go out and see if he could get a doughnut and a little carton of milk at one of the shops up the street on the way into town.

He pushed open the tall heavy front door of the hotel and went out into the sunlight. For a moment the sudden brightness stung his eyes—the world was a flat glaring dazzle. Jack squinted, wishing he had remembered to bring his sunglasses downstairs. He went across the apron of red brick and down the four curving steps to the main pathway through the gardens at the front of the hotel.

What happened if she died?

What happened to him—where would he go, who would take care of him, if the worst thing in the world actually took place and she died, for good and all *died*, up in that hotel room?

He shook his head, trying to send the terrible thought away before a lurking panic could rush up out of the Alhambra's well-ordered gardens and blast him apart. He would not cry, he would not let that happen to him—and he would not let himself think about the Tarrytoons and the weight she had lost, the feeling that he sometimes had that she was too helpless and without direction. He was walking very quickly now, and he shoved his hands into his pockets as he jumped down off the curving path through the gardens onto the hotel's drive. *She on the run, son, and you on the run with her.* On the run, but from whom? And to where? Here—just to here, this deserted resort?

He reached the wide street that travelled up the shoreline toward the town, and now all of the empty landscape before him was a whirlpool that could suck him down into itself and spit him out into a black place where peace and safety had never existed. A gull sailed out over the empty road, wheeled around in a wide curve, and dipped back toward the beach. Jack watched it go, shrinking in the air to a smudge of white above the erratic line of the roller-coaster track.

Lester Speedy Parker, a black man with crinkly gray hair and heavy lines cutting down through his cheeks, was down there somewhere inside Funworld and it was Speedy he had to see. That was as clear to Jack as his sudden insight about his friend Richard's father.

A gull screeched, a wave bounced hard gold light toward him, and Jack saw Uncle Morgan and his new friend Speedy as figures almost allegorically opposed, as if they were statues of NIGHT and DAY, stuck up on



plinths, MOON and SUN—the dark and the light. What Jack had understood as soon as he had known that his father would have liked Speedy Parker was that the ex-bluesman had no harm in him. Uncle Morgan, now . . . he was another kind of being altogether. Uncle Morgan lived for business, for deal-making and hustling; and he was so ambitious that he challenged every even faintly dubious call in a tennis match, so ambitious in fact that he cheated in the penny-ante card games his son had now and then coaxed him into joining. At least, Jack *thought* that Uncle Morgan had been cheating in a couple of their games . . . not a man who thought that defeat demanded graciousness.

NIGHT and DAY, MOON and SUN; DARK and LIGHT, and the black man was the light in these polarities. And when Jack's mind had pushed him this far, all that panic he had fought off in the hotel's tidy gardens swarmed toward him again. He lifted his feet and ran.

## 2

When the boy saw Speedy kneeling down outside the gray and peeling arcade building—wrapping electrician's tape around a thick cord, his steel-wool head bent almost to the pier and his skinny buttocks poking out the worn green seat of his workpants, the dusty soles of his boots toed down like a pair of upended surfboards—he realized that he had no idea of what he had been planning to say to the custodian, or even if he intended to say anything at all. Speedy gave the roll of black tape another twist around the cord, nodded, took a battered Palmer knife from the flap pocket of his workshirt and sliced the tape off the roll with a flat surgical neatness. Jack would have escaped from here, too, if he could—he was intruding

on the man's work, and anyhow, it was crazy to think that Speedy could really help him in any way. What kind of help could he give, an old janitor in an empty amusement park?

Then Speedy turned his head and registered the boy's presence with an expression of total and warming welcome—not so much a smile as a deepening of all those heavy lines in his face—and Jack knew that he was at least no intrusion.

"Travellin Jack," Speedy said. "I was beginnin to get afraid you decided to stay away from me. Just when we got to be friends, too. Good to see you again, son."

"Yeah," Jack said. "Good to see you, too."

Speedy popped the metal knife back into his shirt pocket and lifted his long bony body upright so easily, so athletically, that he seemed weightless. "This whole place comin down around my ears," he said. "I just fix it a little bit at a time, enough so everything works more or less the way it should." He stopped in mid-sentence, having had a good look at Jack's face. "Old world's not so fine right now, seems like. Travellin Jack got buckled up to a load of worries. That the way it is?"

"Yeah, sort of," Jack began—he still had no idea of how to begin expressing the things that troubled him. They could not be put into ordinary sentences, for ordinary sentences made everything seem rational. One . . . two . . . three: Jack's world no longer marched in those straight lines. All he could not say weighed in his chest.

He looked miserably at the tall thin man before him. Speedy's hands were thrust deep into his pockets; his thick gray eyebrows pushed toward the deep vertical furrow between them. Speedy's eyes, so light they were almost no color at all, swung up from the blistered paint of the pier and met Jack's own—and suddenly Jack felt better again. He did not understand

why, but Speedy seemed to be able to communicate emotion directly to him: as if they had not met just a week before, but years ago, and had shared far more than a few words in a deserted arcade.

“Well, that’s enough work for now,” Speedy said, glancing up in the direction of the Alhambra. “Do any more and I just spoil em. Don’t suppose you ever saw my office, did you?”

Jack shook his head.

“Time for a little refreshment, boy. The *time* is *right*.”

He set off down the pier in his long-legged gait, and Jack trotted after him. As they jumped down the steps of the pier and began going across the scrubby grass and packed brown earth toward the buildings on the far side of the park, Speedy astonished Jack by starting to sing.

*Travellin Jack, ole Travellin Jack,  
Got a far long way to go,  
Longer way to come back.*

It was not exactly singing, Jack thought, but sort of halfway between singing and talking. If it were not for the words, he would have enjoyed listening to Speedy’s rough, confident voice.

*Long long way for that boy to go,  
Longer way to come back.*

Speedy cast an almost twinkling look at him over his shoulder.

“Why do you call me that?” Jack asked him. “Why am I Travelling Jack? Because I’m from California?”

They had reached the pale blue ticket booth at the entrance to the roller-coaster enclosure, and Speedy

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thrust his hands back in the pockets of his baggy green workpants, spun on his heel, and propped his shoulders on the little blue enclosure. The efficiency and quickness of his movements had a quality almost theatrical—as if, Jack thought, he had known the boy was going to ask that particular question at that precise moment.

*He say he come from California,  
Don he know he gotta go right back . . .*

sang Speedy, his ponderous sculptured face filled with emotion that seemed almost reluctant to Jack.

*Say he come all that way,  
Poor Travellin Jack gotta go right back . . .*

“What?” Jack said. “Go back? I think my mom even sold the house—or she rented it or something. I don’t know what the hell you’re trying to do, Speedy.”

He was relieved when Speedy did not answer him in his chanting, rhythmic sing-song, but said in a normal voice: “Bet you don’t remember meetin me before, Jack. You don’t, do you?”

“Meeting you before? Where was this?”

“California—at least, I *think* we met back there. Not so’s you’d remember, Travellin Jack. It was a pretty busy couple of minutes. Would have been in . . . let me see . . . would have been about four–five years ago. Nineteen seventy-six.”

Jack looked up at him in pure befuddlement. Nineteen seventy-six? He would have been seven years old.

“Let’s go find my little office,” Speedy said, and pushed himself off the ticket booth with that same weightless grace.

Jack followed after him, winding through the tall supports of the roller coaster—black shadows like the grids of tic-tac-toe diagrams overlaid a dusty wasteland sprinkled with beercans and candy wrappers. The tracks of the roller coaster hung above them like an unfinished skyscraper. Speedy moved, Jack saw, with a basketball player's rangy ease, his head up and his arms dangling. The angle of his body, his posture in the crisscrossed gloom beneath the struts, seemed very young—Speedy could have been in his twenties.

Then the custodian stepped out again into the harsh sunlight, and fifty extra years grayed his hair and seamed the back of his neck. Jack paused as he reached the final row of uprights, sensing as if Speedy Parker's illusory juvenescence were the key to them that the Daydreams were somehow very near, hovering all about him.

Nineteen seventy-six? California? Jack trailed off after Speedy, who was going toward a tiny red-painted wooden shack back up against the smooth-wire fence on the far side of the amusement park. He was sure that he had never met Speedy in California . . . but the almost visible presence of his fantasies had brought back to him another specific memory of those days, the visions and sensations of a late afternoon of his sixth year, Jacky playing with a black toy taxi behind the couch in his father's office . . . and his father and Uncle Morgan unexpectedly, magically talking about the Daydreams. *They have magic like we have physics, right? An agrarian monarchy, using magic instead of science. But can you begin to understand how much fucking clout we'd swing if we gave them electricity? If we got modern weapons to the right guys over there? Do you have any idea?*

*Hold on there, Morgan, I have a lot of ideas that apparently have yet to occur to you. . . .*

Jack could almost hear his father's voice, and the peculiar and unsettling realm of the Daydreams seemed to stir in the shadowy wasteland beneath the roller coaster. He began again to trot after Speedy, who had opened the door of the little red shack and was leaning against it, smiling without smiling.

"You got something on your mind, Travellin Jack. Something that's buzzin in there like a bee. Get on inside the executive suite and tell me about it."

If the smile had been broader, more obvious, Jack might have turned and run: the spectre of mockery still hung humiliatingly near. But Speedy's whole being seemed to express a welcoming concern—the message of all those deepened lines in his face—and Jack went past him through the door.

Speedy's "office" was a small board rectangle—the same red as its exterior—without a desk or a telephone. Two up-ended orange crates leaned against one of the side walls, flanking an unplugged electrical heater that resembled the grille of a mid-fifties Pontiac. In the middle of the room a wooden round-back school chair kept company with an overstuffed chair of faded gray material.

The arms of the overstuffed chair seemed to have been clawed open by several generations of cats: dingy wisps of stuffing lay across the arms like hair; on the back of the school chair was a complex graffito of scratched-in initials. Junkyard furniture. In one of the corners stood two neat foot-high piles of paperback books, in another the square fake-alligator cover of a cheap record player. Speedy nodded at the heater and said, "You come round here in January, February, boy, you see why I got that. Cold? Shoo." But Jack was now looking at the pictures taped to the wall over the heater and orange crates.

All but one of the pictures were nudes cut from men's magazines. Women with breasts as large as their heads lolled back against uncomfortable trees and splayed columnar, hard-worked legs. To Jack, their faces looked both fascinating and rapacious—as if these women would take bites out of his skin after they kissed him. Some of the women were no younger than his mother; others seemed only a few years older than himself. Jack's eyes grazed over this needful flesh—all of it, young and unyoung, pink or chocolate-brown or honey-yellow, seemed to press toward his touch, and he was too conscious of Speedy Parker standing beside him, watching. Then he saw the landscape in the midst of the nude photographs, and for a second he probably forgot to breathe.

It too was a photograph; and it too seemed to reach out for him, as if it were three-dimensional. A long grassy plain of a particular, aching green unfurled toward a low, ground-down range of mountains. Above the plain and the mountains ranged a deeply transparent sky. Jack could very nearly smell the freshness of this landscape. He knew that place. He had never been there, not really, but he knew it. That was one of the places of the Daydreams.

"Kind of catch the eye, don't it?" Speedy said, and Jack remembered where he was. A Eurasian woman with her back to the camera tilted a heart-shaped rear and smiled at him over her shoulder. Yes, Jack thought. "Real pretty place," Speedy said. "I put that one up myself. All these here girls met me when I moved in. Didn't have the heart to rip em off the wall. They sort of do remind me of way back when, times I was on the road."

Jack looked up at Speedy, startled, and the old man winked at him.

"Do you know that place, Speedy?" Jack asked. "I mean, do you know where it is?"

"Maybe so, maybe not. It might be Africa—someplace in Kenya. Or that might be just my memory. Sit down, Travellin Jack. Take the comfortable chair."

Jack twisted the chair so that he could still see the picture of the Daydream place. "That's *Africa*?"

"Might be somewhere a lot closer. Might be somewhere a fellow could get to—get to anytime he liked, that is, if he wanted to see it bad enough."

Jack suddenly realized that he was trembling, and had been for some time. He balled his hands into fists, and felt the trembling displace itself into his stomach.

He was not sure that he wanted ever to see the Daydream place, but he looked questioningly over at Speedy, who had perched himself on the school chair. "It isn't anyplace in Africa, is it?"

"Well, I don't know. Could be. I got my own name for it, son. I just call it the Territories."

Jack looked back up at the photograph—the long, dimpled plain, the low brown mountains. The Territories. That was right; that was its name.

*They have magic like we have physics, right? An agrarian monarchy . . . modern weapons to the right guys over there . . .* Uncle Morgan plotting. His father answering, putting on the brakes: *We have to be careful about the way we go in there, partner . . . remember, we owe them, by which I mean we really owe them . . .*

"The Territories," he said to Speedy, tasting the name in his mouth as much as asking a question.

"Air like the best wine in a rich man's cellar. Soft rain. That's the place, son."

"You've been there, Speedy?" Jack asked, fervently hoping for a straightforward answer.

But Speedy frustrated him, as Jack had almost



known he would. The custodian smiled at him, and this time it was a real smile, not just a subliminal flare of warmth.

After a moment Speedy said, "Hell, I never been outside these United States, Travellin Jack. Not even in the war. Never got any farther than Texas and Alabama."

"How do you know about the . . . the Territories?" The name was just beginning to fit his mouth.

"Man like me, he hear all kinds of stories. Stories about two-headed parrots, men that fly with their own wings, men who turn into wolves, stories about queens. Sick queens."

*. . . magic like we have physics, right?*

Angels and werewolves. "I've heard stories about werewolves," Jack said. "They're even in cartoons. That doesn't mean anything, Speedy."

"Probably it don't. But I heard that if a man pulls a radish out of the ground, another man half a mile away will be able to smell that radish—the air so sweet and clear."

"But angels . . ."

"Men with wings."

"And sick queens," Jack said, meaning it as a joke—*man, this is some dumb place you make up, broom jockey*. But the instant he spoke the words, he felt sick himself. He had remembered the black eye of a gull fixing him with his own mortality as it yanked a clam from its shell: and he could hear hustlin, bustlin Uncle Morgan asking if Jack could put Queen Lily on the line.

Queen of the Bs. Queen Lily Cavanaugh.

"Yeah," Speedy said softly. "Troubles everywhere, son. Sick Queen . . . maybe dyin. *Dyin*, son. And a world or two waitin out there, just waitin to see if anyone can save her."

Jack stared at him open-mouthed, feeling more or less as if the custodian had just kicked him in the stomach. Save her? Save his mother? The panic started to flood toward him once again—how could *he* save her? And did all this crazy talk mean that she really was dying, back there in that room?

“You got a job, Travellin Jack,” Speedy told him. “A job that ain’t gonna let you go, and that’s the Lord’s truth. I wish it was different.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jack said. His breath seemed to be trapped in a hot little pocket situated at the base of his neck. He looked into another corner of the small red room and in the shadow saw a battered guitar propped against the wall. Beside it lay the neat tube of a thin rolled-up mattress. Speedy slept next to his guitar.

“I wonder,” Speedy said. “There comes times, you know what I mean, you know more than you think you know. One hell of a lot more.”

“But I don’t—” Jack began, and then pulled himself up short. He had just remembered something. Now he was even more frightened—another chunk of the past had rushed out at him, demanding his attention. Instantly he was filmed with perspiration, and his skin felt very cold—as if he had been misted by a fine spray from a hose. This memory was what he had fought to repress yesterday morning, standing before the elevators, pretending that his bladder was not about to burst.

“Didn’t I say it was time for a little refreshment?” Speedy asked, reaching down to push aside a loose floorboard.

Jack again saw two ordinary-looking men trying to push his mother into a car. Above them a huge tree dipped scalloped fronds over the automobile’s roof.

Speedy gently extracted a pint bottle from the gap

between the floorboards. The glass was dark green, and the fluid inside looked black. "This gonna help you, son. Just a little taste all you need—send you some new places, help you get started findin that job I told you bout."

"I can't stay, Speedy," Jack blurted out, now in a desperate hurry to get back to the Alhambra. The old man visibly checked the surprise in his face, then slid the bottle back under the loose floorboard. Jack was already on his feet. "I'm worried," he said.

"Bout your mom?"

Jack nodded, moving backward toward the open door.

"Then you better settle your mind and go see she's all right. You can come back here anytime, Travellin Jack."

"Okay," the boy said, and then hesitated before running outside. "I think . . . I think I remember when we met before."

"Nah, nah, my brains got twisted," Speedy said, shaking his head and waving his hands back and forth before him. "You had it right. We never met before last week. Get on back to your mom and set your mind at ease."

Jack sprinted out the door and ran through the dimensionless sunlight to the wide arch leading to the street. Above it he could see the letters DLROWNUF AIDACRA outlined against the sky: at night, colored bulbs would spell out the park's name in both directions. Dust puffed up beneath his Nikes. Jack pushed himself against his own muscles, making them move faster and harder, so that by the time he burst out through the arch, he felt almost as though he were flying.

Nineteen seventy-six. Jack had been puttering his way up Rodeo Drive on an afternoon in June?

July? . . . some afternoon in the drought season, but before that time of the year when everybody started worrying about brushfires in the hills. Now he could not even remember where he had been going. A friend's house? It had not been an errand of any urgency. He had, Jack remembered, just reached the point where he no longer thought of his father in every unoccupied second—for many months after Philip Sawyer's death in a hunting accident, his shade, his loss had sped toward Jack at a bruising speed whenever the boy was least prepared to meet it. Jack was only seven, but he knew that part of his childhood had been stolen from him—his six-year-old self now seemed impossibly naive and thoughtless—but he had learned to trust his mother's strength. Formless and savage threats no longer seemed to conceal themselves in dark corners, closets with half-open doors, shadowy streets, empty rooms.

The events of that aimless summer afternoon in 1976 had murdered this temporary peace. After it, Jack slept with his light on for six months; nightmares roiled his sleep.

The car pulled across the street just a few houses up from the Sawyers' white three-story Colonial. It had been a green car, and that was all that Jack had known about it except that it was not a Mercedes—Mercedes was the only kind of automobile he knew by sight. The man at the wheel had rolled down his window and smiled at Jack. The boy's first thought had been that he knew this man—the man had known Phil Sawyer, and wanted just to say hello to his son. Somehow that was conveyed by the man's smile, which was easy and unforced and familiar. Another man leaned forward in the passenger seat and peered toward Jack through blind-man glasses—round and so dark they were nearly black. This second man was

wearing a pure white suit. The driver let his smile speak for him a moment longer.

Then he said, "Sonny, do you know how we get to the Beverly Hills Hotel?" So he was a stranger after all. Jack experienced an odd little flicker of disappointment.

He pointed straight up the street. The hotel was right up there, close enough so that his father had been able to walk to breakfast meetings in the Loggia.

"Straight ahead?" the driver asked, still smiling.

Jack nodded.

"You're a pretty smart little fellow," the man told him, and the other man chuckled. "Any idea of how far up it is?" Jack shook his head. "Couple of blocks, maybe?"

"Yeah." He had begun to get uncomfortable. The driver was still smiling, but now the smile looked bright and hard and empty. And the passenger's chuckle had been wheezy and damp, as if he were sucking on something wet.

"Five, maybe? Six? What do you say?"

"About five or six, I guess," Jack said, stepping backward.

"Well, I sure do want to thank you, little fellow," the driver said. "You don't happen to like candy, do you?" He extended a closed fist through the window, turned it palm-up, and opened his fingers: a Tootsie Roll. "It's yours. Take it."

Jack tentatively stepped forward, hearing in his mind the words of a thousand warnings involving strange men and candy. But this man was still in his car; if he tried anything, Jack could be half a block away before the man got his door open. And to not take it somehow seemed a breach of civility. Jack took another step nearer. He looked at the man's eyes, which were blue and as bright and hard as his smile.

Jack's instincts told him to lower his hand and walk away. He let his hand drift an inch or two nearer the Tootsie Roll. Then he made a little stabbing peck at it with his fingers.

The driver's hand clamped around Jack's, and the passenger in blind-man glasses laughed out loud. Astonished, Jack stared into the eyes of the man gripping his hand and saw them start to change—*thought* he saw them start to change—from blue to yellow.

But later they were yellow.

The man in the other seat pushed his door open and trotted around the back of the car. He was wearing a small gold cross in the lapel of his silk suit coat. Jack pulled frantically away, but the driver smiled brightly, emptily, and held him fast. "NO!" Jack yelled. "HELP!"

The man in dark glasses opened the rear door on Jack's side.

"HELP ME!" Jack screamed.

The man holding him began to squeeze him down into a shape that would fit into the open door. Jack bucked, still yelling, but the man effortlessly tightened his hold. Jack struck at his hands, then tried to push the hands off him. With horror, he realized that what he felt beneath his fingers was not skin. He twisted his head and saw that clamped to his side and protruding from the black sleeve was a hard, pinching thing like a claw or a jointed talon. Jack screamed again.

From up the street came a loud voice: "Hey, stop messin with that boy! You! Leave that boy alone!"

Jack gasped with relief, and twisted as hard as he could in the man's arms. Running toward them from the end of the block was a tall thin black man, still shouting. The man holding him dropped Jack to the sidewalk and took off around the back of the car. The front door of one of the houses behind Jack slammed open—another witness.

"Move, *move*," said the driver, already stepping on the accelerator. White Suit jumped back into the passenger seat, and the car spun its wheels and squealed diagonally across Rodeo Drive, barely missing a long white Clenet driven by a suntanned man in tennis whites. The Clenet's horn blared.

Jack picked himself up off the sidewalk. He felt dizzy. A bald man in a tan safari suit appeared beside him and said, "Who were they? Did you get their names?"

Jack shook his head.

"How do you feel? We ought to call the police."

"I want to sit down," Jack said, and the man backed away a step.

"You want me to call the police?" he asked, and Jack shook his head.

"I can't believe this," the man said. "Do you live around here? I've seen you before, haven't I?"

"I'm Jack Sawyer. My house is just down there."

"The white house," the man said, nodding. "You're Lily Cavanaugh's kid. I'll walk you home, if you like."

"Where's the other man?" Jack asked him. "The black man—the one who was shouting."

He took an uneasy step away from the man in the safari suit. Apart from the two of them, the street was empty.

Lester Speedy Parker had been the man running toward him. Speedy had saved his life back then, Jack realized, and ran all the harder toward the hotel.

### 3

"You get any breakfast?" his mother asked him, spilling a cloud of smoke out of her mouth. She wore a scarf over her hair like a turban, and with her hair hidden that way, her face looked bony and vulnerable

to Jack. A half-inch of cigarette smouldered between her second and third fingers, and when she saw him glance at it, she snubbed it out in the ashtray on her dressing table.

"Ah, no, not really," he said, hovering in the door of her bedroom.

"Give me a clear yes or no," she said, turning back to the mirror. "The ambiguity is killing me." Her mirror-wrist and mirror-hand, applying the makeup to Lily's face, looked stick-thin.

"No," he said.

"Well, hang on for a second and when your mother has made herself beautiful she'll take you downstairs and buy you whatever your heart desires."

"Okay," he said. "It just seemed so depressing, being there all alone."

"I swear, what you have to be depressed about . . ." She leaned forward and inspected her face in the mirror. "I don't suppose you'd mind waiting in the living room, Jacky? I'd rather do this alone. Tribal secrets."

Jack wordlessly turned away and wandered back into the living room.

When the telephone rang, he jumped about a foot.

"Should I get that?" he called out.

"Thank you," her cool voice came back.

Jack picked up the receiver and said hello.

"Hey kid, I finally got you," said Uncle Morgan Sloat. "What in the *world* is going on in your momma's head? Jesus, we could have a real situation here if somebody doesn't start paying attention to details. Is she there? Tell her she has to talk to me—I don't care what she says, she has to talk to me. Trust me, kiddo."

Jack let the phone dangle in his hand. He wanted to hang up, to get in the car with his mother and drive to another hotel in another state. He did not hang up.



He called out, "Mom, Uncle Morgan's on the phone. He says you have to talk to him."

She was silent for a moment, and he wished he could have seen her face. Finally she said, "I'll take it in here, Jacky."

Jack already knew what he was going to have to do. His mother gently shut her bedroom door; he heard her walking back to the dressing table. She picked up the telephone in her bedroom. "Okay, Jacky," she called through the door. "Okay," he called back. Then he put the telephone back to his ear and covered the mouthpiece with his hand so that no one would hear him breathing.

"Great stunt, Lily," Uncle Morgan said. "Terrific. If you were still in pictures, we could probably get a little mileage out of this. Kind of a 'Why Has This Actress Disappeared?' thing. But don't you think it's time you started acting like a rational person again?"

"How did you find me?" she asked.

"You think you're hard to find? Give me a break, Lily, I want you to get your ass back to New York. It's time you stopped running away."

"Is that what I'm doing, Morgan?"

"You don't exactly have all the time in the world, Lily, and I don't have enough time to waste to chase you all over New England. Hey, hold on. Your kid never hung up his phone."

"Of course he did."

Jack's heart had stopped some seconds earlier.

"Get off the line, kid," Morgan Sloat's voice said to him.

"Don't be ridiculous, Sloat," his mother said.

"I'll tell you what's ridiculous, lady. You holing up in some seedy resort when you ought to be in the hospital, *that's* ridiculous. Jesus, don't you know we have about a million business decisions to make? I

care about your son's education, too, and it's a damn good thing I do. You seem to have given up on that."

"I don't want to talk to you anymore," Lily said.

"You don't want to, but you have to. I'll come up there and put you in a hospital by force if I have to. We gotta make *arrangements*, Lily. You own half of the company I'm trying to run—and Jack gets your half after you're gone. I want to make sure Jack's taken care of. And if you think that taking care of Jack is what you're doing up there in goddam New Hampshire, then you're a lot sicker than you know."

"What do you want, Sloat?" Lily asked in a tired voice.

"You know what I want—I want everybody taken care of. I want what's fair. I'll take care of Jack, Lily. I'll give him fifty thousand dollars a year—you think about that, Lily. I'll see he goes to a good college. You can't even keep him in school."

"Noble Sloat," his mother said.

"Do you think that's an answer? Lily, you need help and I'm the only one offering."

"What's your cut, Sloat?" his mother asked.

"You know damn well. I get what's fair. I get what's coming to me. Your interest in Sawyer and Sloat—I worked my ass off for that company, and it ought to be mine. We could get the paperwork done in a morning, Lily, and then concentrate on getting you taken care of."

"Like Tommy Woodbine was taken care of," she said. "Sometimes I think you and Phil were *too* successful, Morgan. Sawyer and Sloat was more manageable before you got into real-estate investments and production deals. Remember when you had only a couple of deadbeat comics and a half-dozen hopeful actors and screenwriters as clients? I liked life better before the megabucks."

"Manageable, who are you kidding?" Uncle Morgan yelled. "You can't even manage yourself!" Then he made an effort to calm himself. "And I'll forget you mentioned Tom Woodbine. That was beneath even you, Lily."

"I'm going to hang up now, Sloat. Stay away from here. And stay away from Jack."

"You are going into a hospital, Lily, and this running around is going to—"

His mother hung up in the middle of Uncle Morgan's sentence; Jack gently put down his own receiver. Then he took a couple of steps closer to the window, as if not to be seen anywhere near the living-room phone. Only silence came from the closed bedroom.

"Mom?" he said.

"Yes, Jacky?" He heard a slight wobble in her voice.

"You okay? Is everything all right?"

"Me? Sure." Her footsteps came softly to the door, which cracked open. Their eyes met, his blue to her blue. Lily swung the door all the way open. Again their eyes met, for a moment of uncomfortable intensity. "Of course everything's all right. Why wouldn't it be?" Their eyes disengaged. Knowledge of some kind had passed between them, but what? Jack wondered if she knew that he had listened to her conversation; then he thought that the knowledge they had just shared was—for the first time—the fact of her illness.

"Well," he said, embarrassed now. His mother's disease, that great unspeakable subject, grew obscenely large between them. "I don't know, exactly. Uncle Morgan seemed . . ." He shrugged.

Lily shivered, and Jack came to another great recognition. His mother was afraid—at least as afraid as he was.

She plugged a cigarette in her mouth and snapped

open her lighter. Another stabbing look from her deep eyes. "Don't pay any attention to that pest, Jack. I'm just irritated because it really doesn't seem that I'll ever be able to get away from him. Your Uncle Morgan likes to bully me." She exhaled gray smoke. "I'm afraid that I don't have much appetite for breakfast anymore. Why don't you take yourself downstairs and have a real breakfast this time?"

"Come with me," he said.

"I'd like to be alone for a while, Jack. Try to understand that."

*Try to understand that.*

*Trust me.*

These things that grown-ups said, meaning something else entirely.

"I'll be more companionable when you come back," she said. "That's a promise."

And what she was really saying was *I want to scream, I can't take any more of this, get out, get out!*

"Should I bring you anything?"

She shook her head, smiling toughly at him, and he had to leave the room, though he no longer had any stomach for breakfast either. Jack wandered down the corridor to the elevators. Once again, there was only one place to go, but this time he knew it before he ever reached the gloomy lobby and the ashen, censorious desk clerk.

## 4

Speedy Parker was not in the small red-painted shack of an office; he was not out on the long pier, in the arcade where the two old boys were back playing Skee-Ball as if it were a war they both knew they would lose; he was not in the dusty vacancy beneath the roller coaster. Jack Sawyer turned aimlessly in

the harsh sunlight, looking down the empty avenues and deserted public places of the park. Jack's fear tightened itself up a notch. Suppose something had happened to Speedy? It was impossible, but what if Uncle Morgan had found out about Speedy (found out what, though?) and had . . . Jack mentally saw the WILD CHILD van careening around a corner, grinding its gears and picking up speed.

He jerked himself into motion, hardly knowing which way he meant to go. In the bright panic of his mood, he saw Uncle Morgan running past a row of distorting mirrors, turned by them into a series of monstrous and deformed figures. Horns grew on his bald brow, a hump flowered between his fleshy shoulders, his wide fingers became shovels. Jack veered sharply off to the right, and found himself moving toward an oddly shaped, almost round building of white slatlike boards.

From within it he suddenly heard a rhythmic *tap tap tap*. The boy ran toward the sound—a wrench hitting a pipe, a hammer striking an anvil, a noise of work. In the midst of the slats he found a doorknob and pulled open a fragile slat-door.

Jack went forward into striped darkness, and the sound grew louder. The darkness changed form around him, altered its dimensions. He stretched out his hands and touched canvas. This slid aside; instantly, glowing yellow light fell about him. “Travellin Jack,” said Speedy’s voice.

Jack turned toward the voice and saw the custodian seated on the ground beside a partially dismantled merry-go-round. He held a wrench in his hand, and before him a white horse with a foamy mane lay impaled by a long silver stake from pommel to belly. Speedy gently put the wrench on the ground. “Are you ready to talk now, son?” he asked.

# 4

## Jack Goes Over

### 1

“Yes, I’m ready now,” Jack said in a perfectly calm voice, and then burst into tears.

“Say, Travellin Jack,” Speedy said, dropping his wrench and coming to him. “Say, son, take her easy, take her easy now. . . .”

But Jack couldn’t take her easy. Suddenly it was too much, all of it, too much, and it was cry or just sink under a great wave of blackness—a wave which no bright streak of gold could illuminate. The tears hurt, but he sensed the terror would kill him if he did not cry it out.

“You do your weepin, Travellin Jack,” Speedy said, and put his arms around him. Jack put his hot, swollen face against Speedy’s thin shirt, smelling the man’s smell—something like Old Spice, something like cinnamon, something like books that no one has taken out of the library in a long time. Good smells, comforting smells. He groped his arms around Speedy; his palms felt the bones in Speedy’s back, close to the surface, hardly covered by scant meat.

“You weep if it put you easy again,” Speedy said, rocking him. “Sometimes it does. I know. Speedy knows how far you been, Travellin Jack, and how far you got to go, and how you tired. So you weep if it put you easy.”

Jack barely understood the words—only the sounds of them, soothing and calming.

“My mother’s really sick,” he said at last against

Speedy's chest. "I think she came here to get away from my father's old partner. Mr. Morgan Sloat." He sniffed mightily, let go of Speedy, stepped back, and rubbed at his swollen eyes with the heels of his hands. He was surprised at his lack of embarrassment—always before, his tears had disgusted and shamed him . . . it was almost like peeing your pants. Was that because his mother had always been so tough? He supposed that was part of it, all right; Lily Cavanaugh had little use for tears.

"But that ain't the only reason she come here, was it?"

"No," Jack said in a low voice. "I think . . . she came here to die." His voice rose impossibly on the last word, making a squeak like an unoiled hinge.

"Maybe," Speedy said, looking at Jack steadily. "And maybe you here to save her. Her . . . and a woman just like her."

"Who?" Jack said through numb lips. He knew who. He didn't know her name, but he knew who.

"The Queen," Speedy said. "Her name is Laura DeLoessian, and she is the Queen of the Territories."

## 2

"Help me," Speedy grunted. "Catch ole Silver Lady right under the tail. You be takin' liberties with the Lady, but I guess she ain't gonna mind if you're help-in me get her back where she belong."

"Is that what you call her? Silver Lady?"

"Yeah bob," Speedy said, grinning, showing perhaps a dozen teeth, top and bottom. "All carousel horses is named, don't you know that? Catch on. Travellin Jack!"

Jack reached under the white horse's wooden tail and locked his fingers together. Grunting, Speedy

wrapped his big brown hands around the Lady's forelegs. Together they carried the wooden horse over to the canted dish of the carousel, the pole pointing down, its far end sinister with layers of Quaker State oil.

"Little to the left . . ." Speedy gasped. "Yeah . . . now peg her, Travellin Jack! Peg her down good!"

They seated the pole and then stood back, Jack panting, Speedy grinning and gasping wheezily. The black man armed sweat from his brow and then turned his grin on Jack.

"My, ain't we cool?"

"If you say so," Jack answered, smiling.

"I say so! Oh yes!" Speedy reached into his back pocket and pulled out the dark green pint bottle. He unscrewed the cap, drank—and for a moment Jack felt a weird certainty: he could see through Speedy. Speedy had become transparent, as ghostly as one of the spirits on the *Topper* show, which they showed on one of the indy stations out in L.A. Speedy was disappearing. *Disappearing*, Jack thought, *or going someplace else?* But that was another nutty thought; it made no sense at all.

Then Speedy was as solid as ever. It had just been a trick his eyes had played, a momentary—

*No. No it wasn't. For just a second he almost wasn't here!*

—hallucination.

Speedy was looking shrewdly at him. He started to hold the bottle out to Jack, then shook his head a little. He recapped it instead, and then slid it into his back pocket again. He turned to study the Silver Lady, back in her place on the carousel, now needing only to have her post bolted securely into place. He was smiling. "We just as cool as we can be, Travellin Jack."



“Speedy—”

“All of em is named,” Speedy said, walking slowly around the canted dish of the carousel, his footfalls echoing in the high building. Overhead, in the shadowy crisscross of the beams, a few barnswallows cooed softly. Jack followed him. “Silver Lady . . . Midnight . . . this here roan is Scout . . . this mare’s Ella Speed.”

The black man threw back his head and sang, startling the barnswallows into flight:

“*‘Ella Speed was havin her lovin fun . . . let me tell you what old Bill Martin done. . . .’* Hoo! Look at em fly!” He laughed . . . but when he turned to Jack, he was serious again. “You like to take a shot at savin your mother’s life, Jack? Hers, and the life of that other woman I tole you about?”

“I . . .” . . . *don’t know how*, he meant to say, but a voice inside—a voice which came from that same previously locked room from which the memory of the two men and the attempted kidnapping had come that morning—rose up powerfully: *You do know! You might need Speedy to get you started, but you do know, Jack. You do.*

He knew that voice so very well. It was his father’s voice.

“I will if you tell me how,” he said, his voice rising and falling unevenly.

Speedy crossed to the room’s far wall—a great circular shape made of narrow slatted boards, painted with a primitive but wildly energetic mural of dashing horses. To Jack, the wall looked like the pull-down lid of his father’s rolltop desk (and that desk had been in Morgan Sloat’s office the last time Jack and his mother had been there, he suddenly remembered—the thought brought a thin, milky anger with it).

Speedy pulled out a gigantic ring of keys, picked

thoughtfully through them, found the one he wanted, and turned it in a padlock. He pulled the lock out of the hasp, clicked it shut, and dropped it into one of his breast pockets. Then he shoved the entire wall back on its track. Gorgeously bright sunlight poured in, making Jack narrow his eyes. Water ripples danced benignly across the ceiling. They were looking at the magnificent sea-view the riders of the Arcadia Funworld Carousel got each time Silver Lady and Midnight and Scout carried them past the east side of the round carousel building. A light sea-breeze pushed Jack's hair back from his forehead.

"Best to have sunlight if we're gonna talk about this," Speedy said. "Come on over here, Travellin Jack, and I'll tell you what I can . . . which ain't all I know. God forbid you should ever have to get all of that."

### 3

Speedy talked in his soft voice—it was as mellow and soothing to Jack as leather that has been well broken in. Jack listened, sometimes frowning, sometimes gaping.

"You know those things you call the Daydreams?"

Jack nodded.

"Those things ain't dreams, Travellin Jack. Not daydreams, not nightdreams, either. That place is a real place. Real enough, anyway. It's a lot different from here, but it's real."

"Speedy, my mom says—"

"Never mind that right now. She don't know about the Territories . . . but, in a way, she *do* know about them. Because your daddy, *he* knew. And this other man—"

"Morgan Sloat?"

"Yeah, I reckon. He knows too." Then, cryptically, Speedy added, "I know who he is over there, too. Don't I! Whooo!"

"The picture in your office . . . not Africa?"

"Not Africa."

"Not a trick?"

"Not a trick."

"And my father went to this place?" he asked, but his heart already knew the answer—it was an answer that clarified too many things not to be true. But, true or not, Jack wasn't sure how much of it he wanted to *believe*. Magic lands? Sick queens? It made him uneasy. It made him uneasy about his mind. Hadn't his mother told him over and over again when he was small that he shouldn't confuse his Daydreaming with what was really real? She had been very stern about that, and she had frightened Jack a little. Perhaps, he thought now, she had been frightened herself. Could she have lived with Jack's father for so long and not known *something*? Jack didn't think so. *Maybe*, he thought, *she didn't know very much . . . just enough to scare her*.

*Going nuts*. That's what she was talking about. People who couldn't tell the difference between real things and make-believe were going nuts.

But his father had known a different truth, hadn't he? Yes. He and Morgan Sloat.

*They have magic like we have physics, right?*

"Your father went often, yes. And this other man, Groat—"

"Sloat."

"Yeah-bob! Him. He went, too. Only your dad, Jacky, he went to see and learn. The other fella, he just went to plunder him out a fortune."

"Did Morgan Sloat kill my Uncle Tommy?" Jack asked.

"Don't know nuthin bout that. You just listen to me, Travellin Jack. Because time is short. If you really think this fellow Sloat is gonna turn up here—"

"He sounded awful mad," Jack said. Just thinking about Uncle Morgan showing up in Arcadia Beach made him feel nervous.

"—then time is shorter than ever. Because maybe he wouldn't mind so bad if your mother died. And his Twinner is sure hopin that Queen Laura dies."

"Twinner?"

"There's people in this world have got Twinners in the Territories," Speedy said. "Not many, because there's a lot less people over there—maybe only one for every hundred thousand over here. But Twinners can go back and forth the easiest."

"This Queen . . . she's my mother's . . . her Twinner?"

"Yeah, seems like she is."

"But my mother never—?"

"No. She never has. No reason."

"My father had a . . . a Twinner?"

"Yes indeed he did. A fine man."

Jack wet his lips—what a crazy conversation this was! Twinners and Territories! "When my father died over here, did his Twinner die over there?"

"Yeah. Not zackly the same time, but almost."

"Speedy?"

"What?"

"Have I got a Twinner? In the Territories?"

And Speedy looked at him so seriously that Jack felt a deep chill go up his back. "Not you, son. There's only one of you. You special. And this fella Smoot—"

"Sloat," Jack said, smiling a little.

"—yeah, whatever, he knows it. That be one of the reasons he be coming up here soon. And one of the reasons you got to get movin."

"*Why?*" Jack burst out. "What good can I do if it's cancer? If it's cancer and she's here instead of in some clinic, it's because there's no *way*, if she's here, see, it means—" The tears threatened again and he swallowed them back frantically. "It means it must be all through her."

*All through her.* Yes. That was another truth his heart knew: the truth of her accelerating weight-loss, the truth of the brown shadows under her eyes. *All through her*, but please God, hey, God, please, man, she's my *mother*—

"I mean," he finished in a thick voice, "what good is that Daydream place going to do?"

"I think we had enough jaw-chin for now," Speedy said. "Just believe this here, Travellin Jack: I'd never tell you you ought to go if you couldn't do her some good."

"But—"

"Get quiet, Travellin Jack. Can't talk no more till I show you some of what I mean. Wouldn't do no good. Come on."

Speedy put an arm around Jack's shoulders and led him around the carousel dish. They went out the door together and walked down one of the amusement park's deserted byways. On their left was the Demon Dodgem Cars building, now boarded and shuttered. On their right was a series of booths: Pitch Til U Win, Famous Pier Pizza & Dough-Boys, the Rimfire Shooting Gallery, also boarded up (faded wild animals pranced across the boards—lions and tigers and bears, o my).

They reached the wide main street, which was called Boardwalk Avenue in vague imitation of Atlantic City—Arcadia Funworld had a pier, but no real boardwalk. The arcade building was now a hundred yards down to their left and the arch marking the

entrance to Arcadia Funworld about two hundred yards down to their right. Jack could hear the steady, grinding thunder of the breaking waves, the lonely cries of the gulls.

He looked at Speedy, meaning to ask him what now, what next, could he mean any of it or was it a cruel joke . . . but he said none of those things. Speedy was holding out the green glass bottle.

"That—" Jack began.

"Takes you there," Speedy said. "Lot of people who visit over there don't need nothin like this, but you ain't been there in a while, have you, Jacky?"

"No." When had he last closed his eyes in this world and opened them in the magic world of the Daydreams, that world with its rich, vital smells and its deep, transparent sky? Last year? No. Further back than that . . . California . . . after his father had died. He would have been about . . .

Jack's eyes widened. Nine years old? That long? Three *years*?

It was frightening to think how quietly, how unobtrusively, those dreams, sometimes sweet, sometimes darkly unsettling, had slipped away—as if a large part of his imagination had died painlessly and unannounced.

He took the bottle from Speedy quickly, almost dropping it. He felt a little panicky. Some of the Daydreams had been disturbing, yes, and his mother's carefully worded admonitions not to mix up reality and make-believe (*in other words don't go crazy, Jacky, ole kid ole sock, okay?*) had been a little scary, yes, but he discovered now that he didn't want to lose that world after all.

He looked in Speedy's eyes and thought: *He knows it, too. Everything I just thought, he knows. Who are you, Speedy?*

"When you ain't been there for a while, you kinda forget how to get there on your own hook," Speedy said. He nodded at the bottle. "That's why I got me some magic juice. This stuff is *special*." Speedy spoke this last in tones that were almost reverential.

"Is it from there? The Territories?"

"Nope. They got *some* magic right here, Travellin Jack. Not much, but a little. This here magic juice come from California."

Jack looked at him doubtfully.

"Go on. Have you a little sip and see if you don't go travellin." Speedy grinned. "Drink enough of that, you can go just about anyplace you want. You're lookin at one who knows."

"Jeez, Speedy, but—" He began to feel afraid. His mouth had gone dry, the sun seemed much too bright, and he could feel his pulsebeat speeding up in his temples. There was a coppery taste under his tongue and Jack thought: *That's how his "magic juice" will taste—horrible.*

"If you get scared and want to come back, have another sip," Speedy said.

"It'll come with me? The bottle? You promise?" The thought of getting stuck there, in that mystical other place, while his mother was sick and Sloat-beset back here, was awful.

"I promise."

"Okay." Jack brought the bottle to his lips . . . and then let it fall away a little. The smell was awful—sharp and rancid. "I don't want to, Speedy," he whispered.

Lester Parker looked at him, and his lips were smiling, but there was no smile in his eyes—they were stern. Uncompromising. Frightening. Jack thought of black eyes: eye of gull, eye of vortex. Terror swept through him.

He held the bottle out to Speedy. "Can't you

take it back?" he asked, and his voice came out in a strengthless whisper. "Please?"

Speedy made no reply. He did not remind Jack that his mother was dying, or that Morgan Sloat was coming. He didn't call Jack a coward, although he had never in his life felt so much like a coward, not even the time he had backed away from the high board at Camp Accomac and some of the other kids had booed him. Speedy merely turned around and whistled at a cloud.

Now loneliness joined the terror, sweeping helplessly through him. Speedy had turned away from him; Speedy had shown him his back.

"Okay," Jack said suddenly. "Okay, if it's what you need me to do."

He raised the bottle again, and before he could have any second or third thoughts, he drank.

The taste was worse than anything he had anticipated. He had had wine before, had even developed some taste for it (he especially liked the dry white wines his mother served with sole or snapper or swordfish), and this was something like wine . . . but at the same time it was a dreadful mockery of all the wines he had drunk before. The taste was high and sweet and rotten, not the taste of lively grapes but of dead grapes that had not lived well.

As his mouth flooded with that horrible sweet-purple taste, he could actually *see* those grapes—dull, dusty, obese and nasty, crawling up a dirty stucco wall in a thick, syrupy sunlight that was silent except for the stupid buzz of many flies.

He swallowed and thin fire printed a snail-trail down his throat.

He closed his eyes, grimacing, his gorge threatening to rise. He did not vomit, although he believed that if he had eaten any breakfast he would have done.



“Speedy—”

He opened his eyes, and further words died in his throat. He forgot about the need to sick up that horrible parody of wine. He forgot about his mother, and Uncle Morgan, and his father, and almost everything else.

Speedy was gone. The graceful arcs of the roller coaster against the sky were gone. Boardwalk Avenue was gone.

He was someplace else now. He was—

“In the Territories,” Jack whispered, his entire body crawling with a mad mixture of terror and exhilaration. He could feel the hair stirring on the nape of his neck, could feel a goofed-up grin pulling at the corners of his mouth. “Speedy, I’m here, my God, I’m here in the Territories! I—”

But wonder overcame him. He clapped a hand over his mouth and slowly turned in a complete circle, looking at this place to which Speedy’s “magic juice” had brought him.

## 4

The ocean was still there, but now it was a darker, richer blue—the truest indigo Jack had ever seen. For a moment he stood transfixed, the sea-breeze blowing in his hair, looking at the horizon-line where that indigo ocean met a sky the color of faded denim.

That horizon-line showed a faint but unmistakable curve.

He shook his head, frowning, and turned the other way. Sea-grass, high and wild and tangled, ran down from the headland where the round carousel building had been only a minute ago. The arcade pier was also gone; where it had been, a wild tumble of granite blocks ran down to the ocean. The waves struck

the lowest of these and ran into ancient cracks and channels with great hollow boomings. Foam as thick as whipped cream jumped into the clear air and was blown away by the wind.

Abruptly Jack seized his left cheek with his left thumb and forefinger. He pinched hard. His eyes watered, but nothing changed.

"It's real," he whispered, and another wave boomed onto the headland, raising white curds of foam.

Jack suddenly realized that Boardwalk Avenue *was* still here . . . after a fashion. A rutted cart-track ran from the top of the headland—where Boardwalk Avenue had ended at the entrance to the arcade in what his mind persisted in thinking of as "the real world"—down to where he was standing and then on to the north, just as Boardwalk Avenue ran north, becoming Arcadia Avenue after it passed under the arch at the border of Funworld. Sea-grass grew up along the center of this track, but it had a bent and matted look that made Jack think that the track was still used, at least once in a while.

He started north, still holding the green bottle in his right hand. It occurred to him that somewhere, in another world, Speedy was holding the cap that went on this bottle.

*Did I disappear right in front of him? I suppose I must have. Jeez!*

About forty paces along the track, he came upon a tangle of blackberry bushes. Clustered amid the thorns were the fattest, darkest, most lush-looking blackberries he had ever seen. Jack's stomach, apparently over the indignity of the "magic juice," made a loud *goinging* sound.

*Blackberries? In September?*

Never mind. After all that had happened today (and it was not yet ten o'clock), sticking at black-

berries in September seemed a little bit like refusing to take an aspirin after one has swallowed a door-knob.

Jack reached in, picked a handful of berries, and tossed them into his mouth. They were amazingly sweet, amazingly good. Smiling (his lips had taken on a definite bluish cast), thinking it quite possible that he had lost his mind, he picked another handful of berries . . . and then a third. He had never tasted anything so fine—although, he thought later, it was not just the berries themselves; part of it was the incredible clarity of the air.

He got a couple of scratches while picking a fourth helping—it was as if the bushes were telling him to lay off, enough was enough, already. He sucked at the deepest of the scratches, on the fleshy pad below the thumb, and then headed north along the twin ruts again, moving slowly, trying to look everywhere at once.

He paused a little way from the blackberry tangles to look up at the sun, which seemed somehow smaller and yet more fiery. Did it have a faint orange cast, like in those old medieval pictures? Jack thought perhaps it did. And—

A cry, as rusty and unpleasant as an old nail being pulled slowly out of a board, suddenly arose on his right, scattering his thoughts. Jack turned toward it, his shoulders going up, his eyes widening.

It was a gull—and its size was mind-boggling, almost unbelievable (but there it was, as solid as stone, as real as houses). It was, in fact, the size of an eagle. Its smooth white bullet-head cocked to one side. Its fish-hook of a beak opened and closed. It fluttered great wings, rippling the sea-grass around it.

And then, seemingly without fear, it began to hop toward Jack.

Faintly, Jack heard the clear, brazen note of many horns blown together in a simple flourish, and for no reason at all he thought of his mother.

He glanced to the north momentarily, in the direction he had been travelling, drawn by that sound—it filled him with a sense of unfocussed urgency. It was, he thought (when there was *time* to think), like being hungry for a specific *something* that you haven't had in a long time—ice cream, potato chips, maybe a taco. You don't know until you see it—and until you do, there is only a need without a name, making you restless, making you nervous.

He saw pennons and the peak of what might have been a great tent—a pavillion—against the sky.

*That's where the Alhambra is*, he thought, and then the gull shrieked at him. He turned toward it and was alarmed to see it was now less than six feet away. Its beak opened again, showing that dirty pink lining, making him think of yesterday, the gull that had dropped the clam on the rock and then fixed him with a horrid stare exactly like this one. The gull was grinning at him—he was sure of it. As it hopped closer, Jack could smell a low and noisome stink hanging about it—dead fish and rotted seaweed.

The gull hissed at him and flurried its wings again.

"Get out of here," Jack said loudly. His heart was pumping quick blood and his mouth had gone dry, but he did not want to be scared off by a seagull, even a big one. "Get out!"

The gull opened its beak again . . . and then, in a terrible, open-throated series of pulses, it spoke—or seemed to.

*"Other's iyyyin Ack . . . other's iyyyyyyyyyyin—"*

*Mother's dying, Jack. . . .*

The gull took another clumsy hop toward him, scaly feet clutching at the grassy tangles, beak open—

ing and closing, black eyes fixed on Jack's. Hardly aware of what he was doing, Jack raised the green bottle and drank.

Again that horrible taste made him wince his eyes shut—and when he opened them he was looking stupidly at a yellow sign which showed the black silhouettes of two running kids, a little boy and a little girl. SLOW CHILDREN, this sign read. A seagull—this one of perfectly normal size—flew up from it with a squawk, no doubt startled by Jack's sudden appearance.

He looked around, and was walloped by disorientation. His stomach, full of blackberries and Speedy's pustulant "magic juice," rolled over, groaning. The muscles in his legs began to flutter unpleasantly, and all at once he sat down on the curb at the base of the sign with a bang that travelled up his spine and made his teeth click together.

He suddenly leaned over between his splayed knees and opened his mouth wide, sure he was just going to yark up the whole works. Instead he hiccuped twice, half-gagged, and then felt his stomach slowly relax.

*It was the berries, he thought. If it hadn't been for the berries, I would have puked for sure.*

He looked up and felt the unreality wash over him again. He had walked no more than sixty paces down the cart-track in the Territories world. He was sure of that. Say his stride was two feet—no, say two and a half feet, just to be on the safe side. That meant he had come a paltry hundred and fifty feet. But—

He looked behind him and saw the arch, with its big red letters: ARCADIA FUNWORLD. Although his vision was 20/20, the sign was now so far away he could barely read it. To his right was the rambling, many-winged Alhambra Inn, with the formal gardens before it and the ocean beyond it.

In the Territories world he had come a hundred and fifty feet.

Over here he had somehow come half a mile.

"Jesus Christ," Jack Sawyer whispered, and covered his eyes with his hands.

## 5

"Jack! Jack, boy! Travellin Jack!"

Speedy's voice rose over the washing-machine roar of an old flathead-six engine. Jack looked up—his head felt impossibly heavy, his limbs leaden with weariness—and saw a very old International Harvester truck rolling slowly toward him. Homemade stake sides had been added to the back of the truck, and they rocked back and forth like loose teeth as the truck moved up the street toward him. The body was painted a hideous turquoise. Speedy was behind the wheel.

He pulled up at the curb, gunned the engine (*Whup! Whup! Whup-whup-whup!*), and then killed it (*Habbbbbb . . .*). He climbed down quickly.

"You all right, Jack?"

Jack held the bottle out for Speedy to take. "Your magic juice really sucks, Speedy," he said wanly.

Speedy looked hurt . . . then he smiled. "Whoever tole you medicine supposed to taste good, Travellin Jack?"

"Nobody, I guess," Jack said. He felt some of his strength coming back—slowly—as that thick feeling of disorientation ebbed.

"You believe now, Jack?"

Jack nodded.

"No," Speedy said. "That don't git it. Say it out loud."

"The Territories," Jack said. "They're there. Real. I saw a bird—" He stopped and shuddered.

"What kind of a bird?" Speedy asked sharply.

"Seagull. Biggest damn seagull—" Jack shook his head. "You wouldn't believe it." He thought and then said, "No, I guess *you* would. Nobody else, maybe, but *you* would."

"Did it talk? Lots of birds over there do. Talk foolishness, mostly. And there's some that talks a kind of sense . . . but it's a evil kind of sense, and mostly it's lies."

Jack was nodding. Just hearing Speedy talk of these things, as if it were utterly rational and utterly lucid to do so, made him feel better.

"I think it did talk. But it was like—" He thought hard. "There was a kid at the school Richard and I went to in L.A. Brandon Lewis. He had a speech impediment, and when he talked you could hardly understand him. The bird was like that. But I knew what it said. It said my mother was dying."

Speedy put an arm around Jack's shoulders and they sat quietly together on the curb for a time. The desk clerk from the Alhambra, looking pale and narrow and suspicious of every living thing in the universe, came out with a large stack of mail. Speedy and Jack watched him go down to the corner of Arcadia and Beach Drive and dump the inn's correspondence into the mailbox. He turned back, marked Jack and Speedy with his thin gaze, and then turned up the Alhambra's main walk. The top of his head could barely be descried over the tops of the thick box hedges.

The sound of the big front door opening and closing was clearly audible, and Jack was struck by a terrible sense of this place's autumn desolation. Wide, deserted streets. The long beach with its empty dunes of sugar-sand. The empty amusement park, with the roller-coaster cars standing on a siding under canvas

tarps and all the booths padlocked. It came to him that his mother had brought him to a place very like the end of the world.

Speedy had cocked his head back and sang in his true and mellow voice, *"Well I've laid around . . . and played around . . . this old town too long . . . summer's almost gone, yes, and winter's coming on . . . winter's coming on, and I feel like . . . I got to travel on—"*

He broke off and looked at Jack.

"You feel like you got to travel, ole Travellin Jack?"

Flagging terror stole through his bones.

"I guess so," he said. "If it will help. Help her. Can I help her, Speedy?"

"You can," Speedy said gravely.

"But—"

"Oh, there's a whole string of buts," Speedy said. "Whole *trainload* of buts, Travellin Jack. I don't promise you no cakewalk. I don't promise you success. Don't promise that you'll come back alive, or if you do, that you'll come back with your mind still bolted together.

"You gonna have to do a lot of your ramblin in the Territories, because the Territories is a whole lot smaller. You notice that?"

"Yes."

"Figured you would. Because you sure did get a whole mess down the road, didn't you?"

Now an earlier question recurred to Jack, and although it was off the subject, he had to know. "Did I disappear, Speedy? Did you see me disappear?"

"You went," Speedy said, and clapped his hands once, sharply, "just like *that*."

Jack felt a slow, unwilling grin stretch his mouth . . . and Speedy grinned back.

"I'd like to do it sometime in Mr. Balgo's computer class," Jack said, and Speedy cackled like a child.



Jack joined him—and the laughter felt good, almost as good as those blackberries had tasted.

After a few moments Speedy sobered and said, “There’s a reason you got to be in the Territories, Jack. There’s somethin you got to git. It’s a mighty powerful somethin.”

“And it’s over there?”

“Yeah-bob.”

“It can help my mother?”

“Her . . . and the other.”

“The Queen?”

Speedy nodded.

“What is it? Where is it? When do I—”

“Hold it! Stop!” Speedy held up a hand. His lips were smiling, but his eyes were grave, almost sorrowing. “One thing at a time. And, Jack, I can’t tell you what I don’t know . . . or what I’m not allowed to tell.”

“Not allowed?” Jack asked, bewildered. “Who—”

“There you go again,” Speedy said. “Now listen, Travellin Jack. You got to leave as soon as you can, before that man Bloat can show up an bottle you up—”

“*Sloat.*”

“Yeah, him. You got to get out before he comes.”

“But he’ll bug my mother,” Jack said, wondering why he was saying it—because it was true, or because it was an excuse to avoid the trip that Speedy was setting before him, like a meal that might be poisoned. “You don’t know him! He—”

“I know him,” Speedy said quietly. “I know him of old, Travellin Jack. And he knows me. He’s got my marks on him. They’re hidden—but they’re on him. Your momma can take care of herself. At least, she’s gonna have to, for a while. Because you got to go.”

“Where?”

"West," Speedy said. "From this ocean to the other."

"*What?*" Jack cried, appalled by the thought of such distance. And then he thought of an ad he'd seen on TV not three nights ago—a man picking up goodies at a deli buffet some thirty-five thousand feet in the air, just as cool as a cucumber. Jack had flown from one coast to another with his mother a good two dozen times, and was always secretly delighted by the fact that when you flew from New York to L.A. you could have sixteen hours of daylight. It was like cheating time. And it was easy.

"Can I fly?" he asked Speedy.

"*No!*" Speedy almost yelled, his eyes widening in consternation. He gripped Jack's shoulder with one strong hand. "Don't you let *nuthin* git you up in the sky! You dassn't! If you happened to flip over into the Territories while you was up there—"

He said no more; he didn't have to. Jack had a sudden, appalling picture of himself tumbling out of that clear, cloudless sky, a screaming boy-projectile in jeans with a red-and-white-striped rugby shirt, a sky-diver with no parachute.

"You *walk*," Speedy said. "And thumb what rides you think you can . . . but you got to be careful, because there's strangers out there. Some are just crazy people, sissies that would like to touch you or thugs that would like to mug you. But some are real Strangers, Travellin Jack. They people with a foot in each world—they look that way and this like a god-dam Janus-head. I'm afraid they gonna know you comin before too long has passed. And they'll be on the watch."

"Are they"—he groped—"Twinners?"

"Some are. Some aren't. I can't say no more right now. But you get across if you can. Get across to the

other ocean. You travel in the Territories when you can and you'll get across faster. You take the juice—"

"I hate it!"

"Never mind what you hate," Speedy said sternly. "You get across and you're gonna find a place—another Alhambra. You got to go in that place. It's a scary place, a bad place. But you got to go in."

"How will I find it?"

"It will call you. You'll hear it loud and clear, son."

"Why?" Jack asked. He wet his lips. "Why do I have to go there, if it's so bad?"

"Because," Speedy said, "that's where the Talisman is. Somewhere in that other Alhambra."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"You will," Speedy said. He stood up, then took Jack's hand. Jack rose. The two of them stood face-to-face, old black man and young white boy.

"Listen," Speedy said, and his voice took on a slow, chanting rhythm. "Talisman be given unto your hand, Travellin Jack. Not too big, not too small, she look just like a crystal ball. Travellin Jack, ole Travellin Jack, you be goin to California to bring her back. But here's your burden, here's your cross: drop her, Jack, and all be lost."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jack repeated with a scared kind of stubbornness. "You have to—"

"No," Speedy said, not unkindly. "I got to finish with that carousel this morning, Jack, that's what I got to do. Got no time for any more jaw-chin. I got to get back and you got to get on. Can't tell you no more now. I guess I'll be seein you around. Here . . . or over there."

"But I don't know what to *do*!" Jack said as Speedy swung up into the cab of the old truck.

"You know enough to get movin," Speedy said.

"You'll go to the Talisman, Jack. She'll draw you to her."

"I don't even know what a Talisman is!"

Speedy laughed and keyed the ignition. The truck started up with a big blue blast of exhaust. "Look it up in the dictionary!" he shouted, and threw the truck into reverse.

He backed up, turned around, and then the truck was rattling back toward Arcadia Funworld. Jack stood by the curb, watching it go. He had never felt so alone in his life.

## 5

### Jack and Lily

#### 1

When Speedy's truck turned off the road and disappeared beneath the Funworld arch, Jack began to move toward the hotel. A Talisman. In another Alhambra. On the edge of another ocean. His heart seemed empty. Without Speedy beside him, the task was mountainous, so huge; vague, too—while Speedy had been talking, Jack had had the feeling of *almost* understanding that macaroni of hints and threats and instructions. Now it was close to just being macaroni. The Territories were real, though. He hugged that certainty as close as he could, and it both warmed and chilled him. They were a real place, and he was going there again. Even if he did not really understand everything yet—even if he was an ignorant pilgrim, he was going. Now all he had to do was to try to convince his mother. "Talisman," he said to himself, using the word as the thing, and crossed empty Board-

walk Avenue and jumped up the steps onto the path between the hedges. The darkness of the Alhambra's interior, once the great door had swung shut, startled him. The lobby was a long cave—you'd need a fire just to separate the shadows. The pale clerk flickered behind the long desk, stabbing at Jack with his white eyes. A message there: yes. Jack swallowed and turned away. The message made him stronger, it increased him, though its intention was only scornful.

He went toward the elevators with a straight back and an unhurried step. *Hang around with blackies, huh? Let them put their arms around you, huh?* The elevator whirled down like a great heavy bird, the doors parted, and Jack stepped inside. He turned to punch the button marked with a glowing 4. The clerk was still posed spectrally behind the desk, sending out his dum dum's message. *Niggerlover Niggerlover Niggerlover (like it that way, hey brat? Hot and black, that's for you, hey?)*. The doors mercifully shut. Jack's stomach fell toward his shoes, the elevator lurched upward.

The hatred stayed down there in the lobby: the very air in the elevator felt better once it had risen above the first floor. Now all Jack had to do was to tell his mother that he had to go to California by himself.

*Just don't let Uncle Morgan sign any papers for you. . . .*

As Jack stepped out of the elevator, he wondered for the first time in his life whether Richard Sloat understood what his father was really like.

## 2

Down past the empty sconces and paintings of little boats ridding foamy, corrugated seas, the door marked 408 slanted inward, revealing a foot of the suite's pale carpet. Sunlight from the living-room windows made

a long rectangle on the inner wall. "Hey Mom," Jack said, entering the suite. "You didn't close the door, what's the big—" He was alone in the room. "Idea?" he said to the furniture. "Mom?" Disorder seemed to ooze from the tidy room—an overflowing ashtray, a half-full tumbler of water left on the coffee table.

This time, Jack promised himself, he would not panic.

He turned in a slow circle. Her bedroom door was open, the room itself as dark as the lobby because Lily had never pulled open the curtains.

"Hey, I know you're here," he said, and then walked through her empty bedroom to knock at her bathroom door. No reply. Jack opened this door and saw a pink toothbrush beside the sink, a forlorn hairbrush on the dressing table. Bristles snarled with light hairs. *Laura DeLoessian*, announced a voice in Jack's mind, and he stepped backward out of the little bathroom—that name stung him.

"Oh, not again," he said to himself. "Where'd she go?"

Already he was seeing it.

He saw it as he went to his own bedroom, saw it as he opened his own door and surveyed his rumpled bed, his flattened knapsack and little stack of paperback books, his socks balled up on top of the dresser. He saw it when he looked into his own bathroom, where towels lay in oriental disarray over the floor, the sides of the tub, and the Formica counters.

Morgan Sloat thrusting through the door, grabbing his mother's arms and hauling her downstairs . . .

Jack hurried back into the living room and this time looked behind the couch.

. . . yanking her out a side door and pushing her into a car, his eyes beginning to turn yellow. . . .

He picked up the telephone and punched 0. "This