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Signature Ronald Terhune

Date May 1, 1942

THE CIRCULAR GARDENS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ronald P. Jenkins

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to

Paul McTeer Jenkins

and

Alice Pearl Hooker Jenkins

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Wakeman awakes one day to find the gaze of a dark and enigmatical force directed on him. Soon he discovers that that gaze may be emanating from a long-deserted mansion on top of an unscalable mountain. Paul Fourier, the owner of the mansion, has written a novel titled *The Circular Gardens*. This book begins to insinuate itself into Wakeman's life in strange ways. Indeed, it becomes the center of a mystery, which Wakeman must try to solve. His efforts toward a solution occur under the threat of a comet, the possible destruction of the world, and the rise of a strange cult.

THE BACKGROUND, EVOLUTION AND DESIGN OF
THE CIRCULAR GARDENS

On the morning of February 4, 1992, the Great Book was closed and the eternal present reigned in Bonneville. It was not a coincidence that simultaneously I finished *The Circular Gardens*, my master's thesis and first novel. This event culminated more than two years of work, from conception to execution. In those two years, I filled four notebooks--not with text but with ideas. Such note-taking was necessary because *The Circular Gardens* has a rather exotic design, centered around a plot whose complexity is largely recondite. I am called upon here to provide an "academic" sort of introduction. The temptation is to launch forthwith into a discussion of meaning. Yet to do so might distort a work whose author, fascinated with the relationship of form and content, believes more and more that a work's meaning cannot easily be abstracted from the work itself, and that to perform such abstractions robs art of the very mystery that is its essence. Discussion of meaning, then, will occur only in so far as it is unavoidable in speaking of how this work grew in my mind, and how I determined its design. I believe that these matters are of sufficient complexity to provide ample matter for discussion.

First a word about origins. I am not sure where *The Circular Gardens* got its start--probably in that shadowy region called my world view. Suffice it to say that, for many years, this novel was a mere seed, its genetic structure a strange mixture of the Platonism and existentialism that dominate its author's philosophical preoccupations. This seed lay dormant until it received enough of the nutrients, in the form of literary models, to spring into life as an idea, and eventually attain full flowering as a completed novel.

In general terms, *The Circular Gardens* falls undoubtedly into the "metafiction" genre. (I will not bore the reader with the almost obligatory disclaimers of genre.) This is no accident, as the work of several of my favorite authors, namely Jorge Luis Borges, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Delany and John Barth, belongs also in the realm of metafiction. In the area of influences, I suppose I owe more to Barth than any other: I read his *Giles Goat-Boy* at the age of eighteen, long before I contemplated being an English major, long before I had set my sights on writing a novel. I believe this unrealistic and highly experimental novel set the stage for my later literary interests, becoming a sort of standard against which I have measured fiction since.

Of the fiction that has "measured up," much has been

Barth's, namely the novels *The Sotweed Factor*, *The Floating Opera*, *The End of the Road*, and the brilliant short story collection *Lost in the Funhouse*. In all of these novels is found the same sort of blending of metaphysics and metafiction as that found in *The Circular Gardens*. The story "Title" from *Lost in the Funhouse* was particularly influential: the protagonist of this story is the story itself; the result is a union of form and content as complete as any found in fiction. In essence, "Title" employs form to generate content, a fact which gave me the idea of using the novel itself as a source of its plot. Thus we see Wakeman responding to the very novel he is a character in, to the increasing probability of his own "characterhood."

In Borges' theories and stories I found the sort of Platonism-combined-with-fiction that is at the heart of my novel's aesthetic, or ideological, substructure. "Every novel is an ideal plane inserted into reality" (Borges 194) is, I believe, a way of saying that a novel is a sort of Platonic world of being, an enclosed, self-sufficient realm in which everything is necessary, in which every element is oriented toward the product as a whole.

Vladimir Nabokov's art-for-art's sake aesthetics are also an important influence. The ultimate implication of such aesthetics is an art which refers to nothing but

itself. A totally non-referential novel, of course, is almost an impossibility, because one can hardly do without anthropomorphic characters, and people have a way of having problems that have nothing to do with art. Wake-man, for example, goes through a human-like existential crisis as a result of his partial understanding of his circumstances, which are purely fictional. Yet "art-for-art's-sake" is a dimension of my novel--even if it is an imperfectly realized end--just as it is in Nabokov's art.

The most obvious (and most drastic) of Nabokov's methods of approximating a "pure" fiction is his use of, and exaggeration of, the intrusive author convention, something that Henry James and others thought they had gotten rid of a century ago. Nabokov devises several interesting--even startling--permutations upon the convention. Far from contenting himself with unobtrusive commentary, or an occasional reference to himself in the act of that commentary, Nabokov is known to make appearances in his own novels. At the end of *Lolita*, for example, Humbert Humbert implies that he knows of Nabokov's existence, and of the fact that Nabokov has written the very novel Humbert exists within. In *Invitation to a Beheading* Nabokov appears simultaneously as author and character. The realists and modernists would of course criticize such intrusions as not respecting the frame of the novel. I

disagree: such intrusions tell the reader, in effect, that the novel she is reading is a work of fiction, nothing more. Frames are thus strengthened. Such a message is countervailing to the realist ambition that the novel construct its own world by a strict verisimilitude to "real life." To be valid, say these theorists, the novel must be believable. I think this is an unnecessarily limiting notion, and one which I deliberately disregarded. Like Nabokov and other art-for-art's-sake advocates, I believe art can be valid as art, that fiction can be valid as fiction.

Intrigued by Nabokov's intrusiveness, I determined that I *might* imitate him and appear in *The Circular Gardens*, as both author and character. Whether I followed up on this notion is for the reader to determine. And which of my characters I *am*, if I am any of them, is problematic. At first glance, Paul Fourier might seem to be my stand-in in the world of the novel. But at second glance. . . . This ambiguity is intentional. Here I am influenced by Robbe-Grillet, who writes novels that not only defy interpretation, but often frustrate any notion of what *happens* in them. Certainly, *The Circular Gardens* is not nearly as radical, yet a state of high uncertainty, or mystery, or lack of resolution, is aesthetically attractive to me and a quality that I wanted to develop in

The Circular Gardens. To this end, Fourier is not only a shadowy figure, his entire existence is questionable. The identity of Wakeman's *doppelganger* is never resolved. The city may or may not be on the brink of annihilation. And then there is the question of who wrote the interior *The Circular Gardens*. (Let there be no misunderstanding--I wrote the *exterior* one!) Could Wakeman and Fourier have written one another into existence? That I refused to resolve these issues in the end reveals my attitude that it is pointless to labor through a whole novel to construct a mystery, just to sweep it away at the end. To paraphrase Flannery O'Connor, it is the writer's task not to solve mystery, but to heighten it.

Despite its purely naturalistic layer, which I will leave the reader to contemplate on his own, I believe I succeeded fairly well in devising a novel that was about itself. I am particularly satisfied with the ending, at which point the novel achieves its highest integration of form and content. In the very act of discussing that "final twist, that final irony" of *The Circular Gardens*, Arget is in fact setting that irony up to be delivered in full by Wakeman in his last words, "I wonder how it [the novel] ends." The novel's teleology thus comes back, full circle, to itself.

Which brings me the central image of my novel: the

circle. The use of the circle as a structural device seems now so intuitive that I would like to claim it originated with me, yet I am preceded in this regard by Samuel Delany's great post-modern sci-fi novel *Dhalgren*, which begins and ends in fragments which can be joined. In other words, the last sentence of the novel continues in the first sentence, all to the effect of imprisoning the novel's hero forever in the strange city of Bellona.

I am not sure to what extent Delany's plot influenced me in deciding to write a circular novel; I think that it may have lain dormant until I read Nabokov's observation on the importance of the number three in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (Nabokov, *Lectures* 283). Nabokov seems to imply that Kafka may have written the story around a number. I had heard of other writers who evolved their fiction from such minimal starting points as a set of three or four words; I began wondering if I could do something of the sort, and write a novel, not around people, but, like Kafka may have done, around an abstraction. This curiosity combined with my fascination with modern art and its geometric preoccupations, and then I had it: why not a novel written around a circle, but in a much tighter and more purposive fashion than *Dhalgren*? The notion excited me, because it gave me a way to visualize my novel, to imagine it as more than just writing, or

ideas, or prose--as a form, or, as Borges would have it, "an ideal plane inserted into reality." Moreover, what better structure with which to construct my Platonic-like enclosed world?: the circle is not merely a structure, but a *symbol* of that world. (My sensibilities have always been formalist; there has been much written about metafiction from a deconstructive perspective because such fiction seems to say that words are not referential to "reality." Such a focus is of little interest to me: like Borges and Nabokov, I am interested in constructing little self-contained worlds, not in releasing floods of meaningless language. I would think this is not an uncommon sensibility among writers; Robbe-Grillet says that the novelist *must* be a formalist.)

Originally, I had decided on a circular structure nearly identical to *Dhalgren's*, which I planned to execute with lyrical prose as stirring as that which concludes Delany's novel. But late in the process of writing *The Circular Gardens* I hit on what I thought was the perfect ironical ending. This necessitated that I abandon my intended "wrap-around" sentence, which was just as well because I could neither devise the right scene nor write prose of sufficient poetic strength to carry it off.

Yet I still had a circle to complete. I could not just drop it at the end of the novel: it was *essential* to

the novel. Indeed, I had taken Delany's motif and multiplied it throughout *The Circular Gardens*, even to the point of configuring the plot in concentric circles. My solution was a compromise (how much of writing is compromise!): I duplicated the last sentence of the novel in the first. I am not wholly satisfied with the results--I don't find "I wonder how it ends" to be a particularly engaging first sentence--but with this compromise I was able to preserve the "circle of language" that was so important to the aesthetic whole of my novel.

I chose to write my novel around a circle for reasons additional to its novelty or its usefulness as a structural device. I am intrigued with the double nature of the circle in our symbolisms. On the one hand, it is archetypically the symbol of unity and wholeness. Its presence as a motif in much primitive mythology and art, in dreams, even in city planning has been much noted by anthropologists, psychologists, and literary critics. (See *Man and His Symbols*, edited by Carl Jung.)

On the other hand, the circle seems also to symbolize the absurd. Circular logic is absurd, a circular teleology has absurd aspects, things that have no use outside of themselves, and are thus absurd, are also in a sense circular. Absurd processes, because they are without outlet or exterior function, are circular; Yossarian, the

protagonist of Heller's *Catch 22*, might attest to this, as might Sisyphus.

Working outward from my circular plot, I devised a set of scenes that relate to this dual aspect of the circle. The "Office" scene is an example of the absurd side; the circular museum is an example of a circular "grandeur." That I chose to have Wakeman constantly involving himself in the former is, I suppose, the signature of my world view. It is also a source of some exasperation with my medium: no matter which of the two aspects of the circle Wakeman chooses, I make a statement about the human condition. In other words, I dabble in ideas, which is foreign to my ambition to deal as much as possible, not with people and their problems, but with forms.

In my next life I shall be a musician or a painter.

While I am in the realm of ideas, let me wind toward a conclusion with a cursory look at some of the other thematic lines in the novel. Generally, these themes came into being as a result of my attempt to fully imagine the novel from inside out, to explore its "natural laws." Surprisingly, and ironically, the novel is much like "real life," if for no other reason than the fact that both fiction and life are time-bound. Because Wakeman is suddenly awakened to, among other matters, the nature of

time, part of his existential crisis revolves around the question of whether life is a product or a process, or on a somewhat higher lever, whether there is a novel that he travels around in, or a novel he creates with his actions. Here I have set up an existence/essence dialogue and applied it to the interior of the text. With only a slightly different focus, such a dialogue seems to me to be at the nexus of the difference between postmodern literary theory and its predecessors. Whether the novel is product or process is a question that will be decided depending on one's critical persuasion: I myself think that, like life, it is process, but it's a lot more fun, and usually necessary, to think of it as product.

There are only two or three additional thematic lines of any significance. The first is decadence, which rises out of the end of the world and the "art-for-art's-sake" issues. The second is determinism. If one lives in a great book, how free is one? Are his actions in vain? Wakeman's situation, of course, is Oedipal: his fate is assured, and his every action necessarily leads to that fate, in spite of his "actions" to avoid it. Lastly, there is the idealistic aspect of the novel, its comparison with a world imagined by God.

I must say that this was a very difficult novel to write. If I had it to do over again, I would probably

write a much less complicated one, and save myself at least one semester and several thousand dollars. The major problem I had to address was the fact that this is a novel literally about itself: the so-called "interior" and "exterior" novels are one and the same. Wakeman is quite literally encountering sections of the very book he is a character in. Thus there were reflections, like those of mutually reflecting mirrors, everywhere to be taken into account. Wakeman had to understand just enough of his essentially fictional nature to keep the plot going, but not enough to drive him into an insanity like Daniel's. (Daniel, of course, had read about himself in *the book*.) These reflections were often very difficult to comprehend, let alone negotiate around rhetorically. Occasionally I became paralyzed, with an exotic sort of writer's block.

For the most part, I had a lot of fun writing *The Circular Gardens*; the more I wrote and the more defined the novel became the easier it was to devise scenes. There are parts of it, however, that I am rather unhappy with: my prose seems to me sometimes unnecessarily florid and my style is oftentimes too rhetorical for fiction. Moreover, Fourier's monologues might have taken a more interesting direction--perhaps into full-blown absurdism. Thus, there is room for further work, a bit of revision here, an added scene or altered focus there. Yeats and

Lowell were revising their poetry into their last years; I have a feeling I'll be tinkering with *The Circular Gardens* for some months, at least, to come.

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CHAPTER ONE

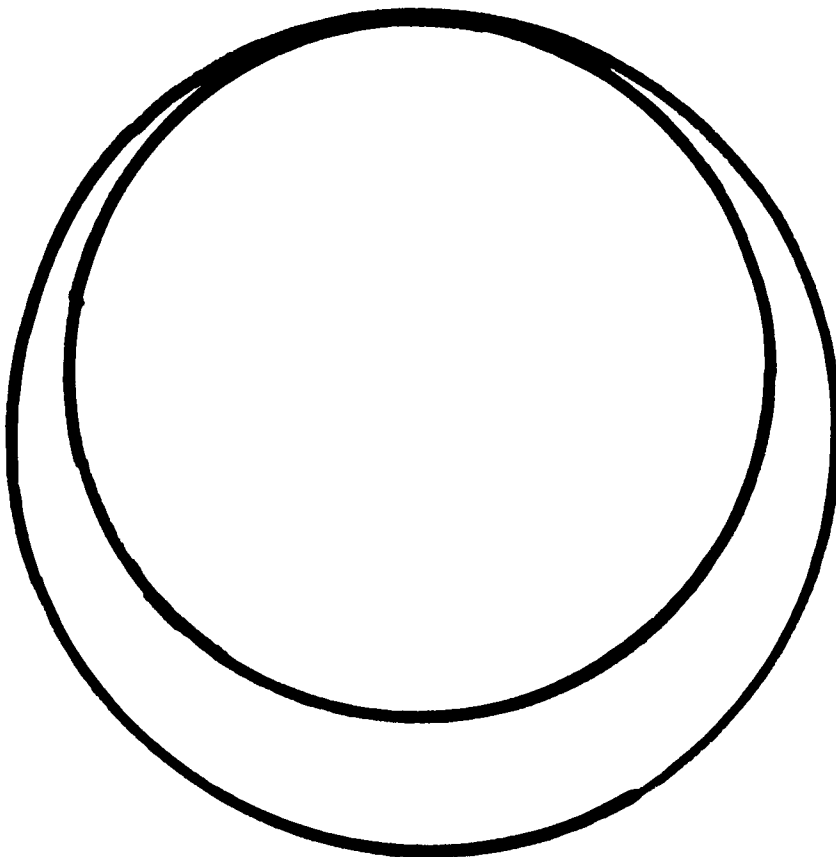
I wonder how it ends. But who can say where a circle begins and where it ends? It begins now, and ends now, and all that happens between happens now, because it is complete. The circle is not exclusively absurd.

On the first evening of the Festival, Thomas Wakeman found himself sitting in the Crystal Palace without memory of having come there, reading a note whose message seemed both to invite interpretation and hint at strangeness to come. Scribbled in his own hand on the back of a transit schedule, the note seemed to hold the key to his mysterious presence in the terminal. In deep concentration, Wakeman read the note over, trying to discern its meaning. A few moments went by, but then Wakeman pushed the schedule across the table, sighed, and sat back. He looked up at the night sky, visible through the terminal's glass ceiling. The round, icy moon looked as if it had been impaled by one of the white mountain peaks that jutted toward it. "I awake," said Wakeman. "And now?" He sat motionless, listening to his voice echoing around the vast, empty terminal. Then a gust of air, blowing debris, blasted through the Palace, and a train raced in out of a dark tube. Suddenly crowds were bustling everywhere.

Many people were in costume, starting for the evening's myriad balls: here a rushing devil slammed into a saint, displacing his halo; there a classical deity picked the pocket of an ancient warrior. A line of angels routed an assembly of space men and farm animals and pushed past them into the open door of a transit car.

All was movement, tearing and howling onwards, a film without title or subject advancing on fast forward.

Wakeman pulled the schedule folder toward him and looked once more at the puzzling note, written in a blank space below the transit symbol.



"I wonder how it ends. . ." began the note. But still Wakeman couldn't understand it. He folded the transit schedule and stuffed it into his pocket.

Several old men in hats and coats, all bearded, stood huddled together on the other side of the turnstile, near the train they seemed to have just disembarked. One of them seemed to catch sight of Wakeman. He said something to the other men and then they were all looking at him. Wakeman returned their gaze for a long moment, which appeared to cause the old men to stiffen in consternation. Then one of them seemed to take charge. He gestured to the others and at a slow trot started for the turnstile.

Wakeman rose, tucked the note into his coat pocket, turned and took measure of his surroundings. Into which part of the great rail terminal had he wandered? He began to look around for the exit through which he would walk toward his apartment, which was near the terminal. Through one side of the Palace's glass ceiling he saw the tops of the office buildings in the central commercial district, through the other the snowcapped peaks (gleaming pale in the moonlight) of the Ramparts. His apartment was located toward the mountains. Wakeman began hurrying toward the immensely long outer wall of the terminal, looking over his shoulder at the line of old men now pushing through the turnstiles. Had they started for him?

He redoubled his speed and headed for an exit sign now visible down the wall. He stepped into the exit corridor, stopped, and turned, peering around the corner to see if the old men were still following. Several pedestrians glanced at him warily. He located the old men through the crowd. They had stopped and were looking around as if in great haste. If they had been pursuing him, they had lost sight of him.

Why, though, would they be following him?

Wakeman exited the Palace and crossed a brightly-lit boulevard. Soon he had left the lights and noise behind and walked up an incline into a quarter of old warehouses, some of which had been converted to apartment buildings. Ahead the very limits of the city were visible, at the point where the steepness of the mountains prohibited further construction. At length his own building, one of the converted warehouses, loomed up out of the night before him.

Wakeman stopped and looked around. Something was amiss. He looked down the street to see if he had been followed. The street was empty. But that was not it. . . . Then he tilted his head toward the sky and he had it: where was the comet? The night sky was clear and the stars shone bright: there was no sign of the comet, which should have been bearing down on the planet, threat-

ening apocalypse. It had been in the news for days. He had seen it blazing overhead--it must have been only the previous night--a broad white effulgence that had settled down over the city like the underside of a giant white chicken. Drops of it had fallen on him, searing his flesh like drops of burning chicken excrement.

He must have been dreaming, thought Wakeman, shaking his head and turning toward the front door of his building. Strange: he was almost certain about the comet. But considering that he had been sleepwalking. . . .

Wakeman unlocked the door. Before closing it behind him and taking the elevator to his own apartment, he took a long look down the darkened street. There was no sign of the old men or any other danger.

Wakeman walked out of the elevator and down the hall to his apartment, stopping to pick up the newspaper on his doorstep before unlocking the door. *Sunday*, it said at the top of the front page. Below the date was the headline, *Festival Begins!*.

The telephone began ringing in the apartment. . Wakeman opened the door and strode over to the phone.

A female voice said, "Are you ready?"

Wakeman couldn't place the voice right away. After a pause, he answered, "Ready for what?"

"Are you awake?"

"Who is this?"

The voice sounded offended. "Hah! Roberta, of course! Thomas, you haven't forgotten about the ball, have you?"

"The ball?"

"Yes, Mrs. Greathouse's ball. The first day of Festival, remember?"

Then it came to Wakeman who was calling and why. It was Roberta Gradapple, the woman with whom he had been having an affair. He was supposed to be at her flat at ten thirty. From there they would drive over to the mansion of Mrs. Greathouse, a socialite and art patron who had purchased several of Roberta's paintings. The mansion was in the Old City near the Metropolitan Museum. Mrs. Greathouse was holding her annual ball.

"Oh. Hi, Roberta. Sorry. I'm a little groggy is all. I've just had the strangest experience. I fell asleep on the couch and the next thing I knew I was sitting in the Crystal Palace. Evidently, I sleepwalked to the Crystal Palace."

"The Palace! You sleepwalked all the way to the Palace? Did you try to get on the train?"

"No. Could a sleepwalker do anything as complicated as that?"

"I don't know. . . . Were you dressed?"

Wakeman looked down. "Yes. Shoes and everything."

"Have you sleepwalked before?"

"Yes. . . . But never like this."

"What was it like?"

"The sleepwalking itself? I sort of remember having strange dreams. Something about a comet--some danger from it, I think. Then I woke up in the Palace."

"Well, that's incredible. But the other hand, it's not. It sounds like something you'd do."

"Oh. Well. Working too hard, I guess. The latest novel, I suppose."

"You've started another?"

"I think I have," he replied in a small voice.

"You *think* you have! Has writing it been so traumatic that you forget you've been writing it? That you sleepwalk?"

He tried to ignore the queasy feeling these sentences generated. Roberta's every word seemed to have a double meaning.

"Yes, I've begun another," he said now with more force. It's titled *Liberation*".

"Well," said Roberta. "What are you going to wear?"

"Uh, what do you mean?"

"To the *ball*."

"Oh, street clothes, I guess. I haven't even thought

about getting a costume."

"How unimaginative."

"I'll be over. I just have to shower."

"It's late. I'll pick you up."

Wakeman looked at the clock. Nine-thirty. Time enough to re-orient himself--if people would just leave him alone. "No, I'll catch the train. It's too far out of your way. I won't be too late."

Wakeman put down the phone, took off his shoes and lay down on the sofa and stretched out and closed his eyes. His aching frame soaked in the relaxation and he could feel his eyelids drooping. Why was he so sore and tired? All he had been doing all day, except for sleepwalking, was grading papers. There they were, a big stack of them, sitting on his desk. He looked around the apartment. Here were all the familiar things of his life: his books, his paintings, his stereo, his sofa and one chair, the single cluttered end table. Yet, suddenly, tonight, they were not familiar. They had a certain sheen of unreality about them, and Wakeman wondered how they had accumulated around him over the years. And then there was the sleepwalking. . . .

Ah, yes. One fine day a man discovers himself mysteriously alienated from his possessions and the routines of life. It could be developed into a novel. Perhaps the

novel he had just begun, *Liberation*.

The sense of strangeness would not leave him.

It was in a state of near dread that Wakeman rose from the couch and wandered over to the alcove in which he kept his word processor. Strange. The computer was switched on. Unlike him to leave the power on. He touched a key on the computer and the screen flashed. The screen was full of text. At its top was a title, *The Circular Gardens*. Wakeman pulled up his chair, sat down, and began to read.

Substrata. III.

It is festival time in the city.

Once again, they seek the plaza, that immense emptiness in the heart of the metropolis, ringed with solemn palaces and cathedrals, where they will merge in collective revelry. They pour from their dwellings and fill the streets, these ancient streets which wind through the city in intricate patterns, some piercing isolated quarters and ending against blank stone walls, others circling back into themselves. The revelers, throngs of them, dressed in all manner of costume--gods, devils, angels, saints, whores, beggars--surge against the walls, these solemn gray walls of stone, giving themselves up to the forces of the multitude that flows ever toward the square. Groups

of revelers find themselves swept helpless and unaware down darkened streets into strange neighborhoods, unpopulated quarters of stone buildings with blank facades and opaque windows. A shadow creeps over city, its source the mountain which rises out of the center of the metropolis, this conical formation whose summit is occupied by my dwelling. The revelers see too late that they have wandered into a quarter of bewildering labyrinths, and that their arrival in the plaza will be delayed. Perhaps they will never arrive, and will wander these solemn streets forever. . . .

In other quarters of the city the populace walks in safety, amidst mansions whose gates open to ordered gardens, whose ornate, lighted windows reveal immense ball-rooms and gliding dancers, whose marble foyers lead to wide carpeted staircases with gilded balustrades. Along these streets, these ancient streets which twist and turn back into themselves, these passages which wind from one blank stone quarter to another, the revelry proceeds. It mounts in intensity near the vast square. The vastness of the square is hardly reduced by the immense populace that swells within it.

In the midst of the Festival, during what may be the last days of the city, a man surges up. . . . Perhaps he is a hero. . . . His name is Arthur Inman.

I sit alone in my dining room, a single light on the far wall reflecting dimly the length of the oaken table before me. The baroque chandelier above hangs dark. My own revelers, the guests I have brought to mitigate the silence and emptiness of my marble palace, I have banished to a remote section of the estate. In several of my many salons, they will soon begin their own festivities. They are just now converging after a period of rest and diversion. Later, they will move to the ballroom. I have hired an orchestra. I will join my guests for a while, then depart. My guests will not miss me; they will not even be able to mark the time of my departure. They will be absorbed in their Festival.

The paintings on my wall are my only company. They hang above the polished mantle that encircles the chamber, and offer their static worlds to me through the dusty gloom.

Of course, in a sense Inman is here too. Unceasingly now I am preoccupied with his wanderings.

The darkening sky hangs low. It is thick with the moisture which from the city looks like clouds, and which now hides my mansion from the sight of the city's populace. Isolated white puffs hang about my lawn. Far below, in the city, Inman sleeps in preparation for the next cycle of his journey.

I, Paul Fourier, want to sleep too. But first I have much to do. For it is festival time, far below, in the city where in a short while innumerable lights will cover the valley and spread up the slopes of the Ramparts. To my comfort, I can no longer see the metropolis: the clouds have rendered it invisible, and it is alien to me.

I think again of Inman. I have watched as he navigated the streets below, as his course wound through the immense hospital by the square, as he trod the stone passages of the city up the mountain into the very heart of the estate, where, for a while, he wandered the marble corridors and carpeted chambers of my mansion. I watched as he spiraled once again into the city to resume his journey and his task.

[Here there was a break in the text, not only a space between paragraphs, but an apparent discontinuity in the action.]

Once again Inman was in the anterior chamber. One could see the puzzlement on his face. Again, he stood before the three doors, one red, one gold, and one silver. Perhaps he was thinking: how was he always directed back to this chamber, this particular chamber, and not out into the city? But whatever his thoughts were they did not

matter, because he had only one door left.

Having already explored behind the gold and silver doors, Inman opened the red door.

[Here was another break in the text.]

"Gentlemen, may I present our new client?" said the tall old man at the desk.

The room was large and dark. Its only illumination came from a table lamp on the desk, and at first one could not see the other occupants of the room. Then one could discern a movement far away, an old man rising from the floor and grasping a chair for support. Bending almost double, he peered with bleary blue eyes through the gloom at Inman.

Then there was a whisper: "Behold, the dream is reality!" To this the man sitting at the desk turned quickly, and from the back of the room another voice whispered, "Quiet!" This dialogue was accompanied by scuffling sounds and a rustling of movement, and one could see that there were several men on the floor in kneeling positions. The men wobbled to their feet and stood in a line and stared at Inman. They were invariably old, and most wore long beards.

"You will excuse my senile colleagues' leisurely

progress at bringing our meeting to order," said the old man at the desk. "May I introduce Doctors Godsmark, Aventi, Falsetti, Fatimata, Hoffman, and several others whose names, at this point, are of no consequence?" The old man's eyes gleamed at Inman. "My name is Malick."

Despite Malick's rudeness there was no sign of indignation or embarrassment from the other old men. Rather, their gazes were riveted on Inman. Due to the darkness they seemed little more than a line of eyes and beards. Inman's attention was eventually drawn back to Malick, who was eyeing him closely. This inspection continued for several moments, the gaze unwavering. Inman was perhaps made uncomfortable, but returned Malick's gaze with perseverance. Malick seemed immeasurably old, but this impression could not be taken wholly from his appearance, for he was tall, thin, straight in posture, and facile of movement. Above his spare frame hung a face whose features, while not entirely ugly, seemed so exaggerated that they made a parodic statement about the conventions of faces in general. The face hung long and narrow, was dark with beard, and a large, thick brown mustache grew from its center. The eyes were of nearly indefinite color, and there was something arresting about them, as if scenes from antiquity were manifest on their surface. An expansive pate topped it all off, bald and smooth. "Well?"

remarked the doctor. "And?"

Inman shook his head, smiled uncertainly. "And what?"

The physician looked at Inman with an expression approaching hilarity. "Well, let's start with what you want to know. Are you not curious about this gathering, this occasion?"

"Of course, yes, I am. But. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, it comes only as one more of a series of puzzling circumstances. So it is not exactly dumbfounding."

Malick threw back his head and laughed, long and deep. "To be expected."

"What do you mean?"

"Enough mystification," uttered a husky, phlegm-filled voice from the back of the room. "Get on with it, Malick."

The old doctor's smile barely faded. "You will excuse the impatience and rudeness of my decaying colleague. Some perhaps take their mission a bit too seriously."

"I would appreciate some clarification," said Inman. "For instance, about how I seem to have come into this building through a chamber that opens also into a museum,

and into a room with a piano in it. I got into one through a silver door, and into the other through a gold door. An unusual arrangement, to say the least."

"Ha!" replied Malick. The physician's expression broke once again into mirth and his exclamation was followed by another (garbled, rhythmic) from down the hall.

"What was that?" said Inman.

"Never mind that," said one of the doctors from the back of the room. "Get on with it, Malick!"

Malick sat quietly, a sardonic expression on his face.

"I don't . . . quite understand . . . any of this," said Inman. He shifted about in his chair and looked quickly about the dark room.

"As I said, to be expected," smiled Malick, his perfect white teeth gleaming. "After all, you have been admitted to a mental ward, my dear sir."

"Admitted? When? I just got here."

"Nevertheless admitted. To St. Superflua's mental floor. What do you think this chamber you speak of, with the doors, means? How is this *strange arrangement* you speak of to be interpreted?"

Inman sat silent as the garbled voice that had previously interrupted Malick sounded once again. This time, its words were audible. "Hey! Hey! Hey!"

A loud, gruff voice, rythmically insistent, redolent of

Here the passage ended, just as Wakeman was attaining a glimpse into the design of the novel (or story, whatever it was). Strange that the fragment had appeared on the screen without being called up. He had not been working on it. Somehow he had accidentally summoned it from deep within the memory of his computer.

However the fragment had come to appear, Paul Fourier had surfaced once again in the Bonneville literary world. Fourier was Wakeman's pen name, under which he had written many stories satirical of the university milieu in which he moved. Was this yet another of his satires? Had he written it so long ago that it had entirely fled his memory? Wakeman exited the file and waited impatiently for the main menu to flash again on the screen, hoping to find more of the piece in other files. But his hopes were in vain: in the long list of files in the computer's hard drive, he could see nothing that obviously related to the title *The Circular Gardens*. Blast his disorganization! But the possibility was that the passage he'd just read was just an isolated fragment, perhaps an improvisation related to one of the many story ideas that whirled around constantly in his mind. *The Circular Gardens* was quite

likely to be just an idea, and not a very important one at that, seeing that he had forgotten it. And what on earth did the title signify? No doubt he would find out, and discover other evidences of the piece in his old notebooks. Perhaps in another file he would find *Substratas I* and *II*, whatever a "substrata" was.

Wakeman shrugged, rose, and prepared to take a shower. *The Circular Gardens* was unimportant, just one of his many evolving fictions.

The only problem was the presence in the fragment of the chief character's name. *Arthur Inman*. Two words that seemed, however insubstantially, to be mixed up with the sleepwalking, two words that reverberated around Wakeman's skull like a desperate gasp in a vast chamber.

CHAPTER TWO

Mansions along the street. The moon. The wind.

Where was the comet?

"Isn't there a comet in the news?" said Wakeman.

"Sure," said Roberta. "Pacelli's comet. It's supposed to be visible any day now."

"Visible any day!" said Wakeman. "Isn't it on a collision course with the planet? It was just a night or two ago that I saw it. . . . Oh, never mind." He stopped because Roberta had made it plain that she had no patience with his idiosyncrasies this evening. She had reacted with exasperation to his disorientation. It was related, she claimed, to an his infuriating absent-mindedness and disorganization, character traits that had been the source of much disagreement between the two lately. Plainly, he irritated her.

She looked over at him slowly, her shoulder-length brown curly hair tumbling over the high neckline of her white evening gown, a costume suggestive of ballrooms several centuries past. "The head's not much brighter than a bright star, and the tail not much further across than the full moon. It'll be days before it'll be bright or big. The end of the world is not in sight, yet."

"Funny. I could have sworn. . . . But I guess I

dreamed it. That's right. That's what I was dreaming about while I was sleepwalking."

"Just another of these romantics I keep getting mixed up with," Roberta said. "Another of this nebulous type who confuse abstraction with abstractiveness, who think just because their real, day-to-day life fuses so readily with their dreams, because they spend days in trance-like states, that they're infused with more spirit than anyone else. And it is certainly within the bounds of the type to be titillated by visions of apocalypse."

"Your empathetic powers are prodigious," noted Wakeman. "But I'm hardly a romantic. The other day you were accusing me of being too analytical."

"Festival is no time to hold me to standards of consistency," said Roberta.

She changed the subject. "What have you been doing lately? I've been too busy to call."

He had an idea and turned toward her. "I've been in a mental institution."

"You're joking," said Rita. "On second thought, why would you be joking? It fits in with the comet business. You have a model to follow. The visionary. It requires you to be insane."

Wakeman continued as if he hadn't heard her. "Why can't I have been in a mental ward? What's the past

anyway? It's all a sort of lie, a story you tell to make sense of otherwise disconnected events. It doesn't exist apart from the telling of it. I was in a mental ward. I had several doctors. Let's see: Malick, Fatimata, Godsmark, Falsetti, I forget the rest."

Roberta looked at him in mock wonder. "You're really electric tonight, aren't you? And just in time for the masquerade! Throw your identity to the winds! Assume another one, or many! Before the night's over, you'll even be dancing."

"Let's not get carried away."

They had crossed the bridge into the Old City. Roberta turned down a side street and stopped in front of a small shop. A costumier's.

"I need an outrageous necklace," said Roberta.

"While we're

here, you might as well get something for yourself."

Wakeman paused. In the past, he had refused to wear costumes during Festival season. They made him feel silly. In truth, he disliked even the balls that everyone attended during Festival, with their noise, their pointless activity, their predictable conversation. He preferred the solitude of his books. In the past few years he had retreated further and further from Bonneville into them. There was, after all, *meaning* in characters' lives,

a reason for their existence. But there he seemed to be drying up artistically. He found that he had little to write about. So lately he had going going out more, hoping that a heightened social life would stimulate his writing. And tonight he could feel it working. He felt invigorated by the idea of assuming a new identity, be it ever so spare in substance. Under cover of anonymity, who knew what mischief he could get into, what new subject matter he could discover?

"Come on, get in the spirit," said Roberta. "Besides, everyone will be wearing a costume. You don't want to stick out, do you?"

Wakeman bounded out of the car and the two went inside. The shop was full of people selecting costumes at the last minute before the evening's festivities. Roberta stopped at the front counter and looked over the zirconia jewelry. Wakeman went on to the clothing racks and selected a few odds and ends: a black hat, cape and mask. He felt swashbuckling.

As Wakeman was paying for the costume, he spotted a wild, bushy beard in the glass case under the register. "I'll take that too," he said.

Roberta looked over. "You have no understanding of the concept of the *ensemble*."

"Well, the beard looks crazy," he replied. "It goes

with my new identity."

They returned to the car.

"Well, go on," said Roberta. "Let's hear more of your day in the asylum."

"If you insist. My admission to the ward came about in a strange way. I found myself in a dark office with several old men, all bearded. And they were kneeling on the floor, as if they were praying or something! They seemed to be expecting me. One of them said something about the dream being reality, which didn't make much sense. It didn't go over too well with the other doctors either. In fact they spent most of the time bickering with one another. The doctor who did most of the interviewing seemed particularly at odds with the rest. But they all seemed fascinated with me, craning their necks at me in their ring of seats in the back and sides of the room. They . . . didn't seem particularly interested in curing me: they seemed to want something from me."

"You make it seem more like an interrogation than a therapeutic interview."

"That's what it was like. But one with no discernible point."

With the gesture of a finger, Roberta designated a mansion ahead as Mrs. Greathouse's. She spied a parking place and shot the car into it. The engine shuddered to a

stop.

"You probably just got drunk and someone took you in," she snickered, trying to comply with Wakeman's invention. She rummaged about in her purse and took out a pack of cigarettes.

"It's far more complicated than that," Wakeman said. "I seem to be on the verge of some momentous fate, some great and ambiguous realization."

"You fit the model more and more completely. Before you were merely neurotic. Now you've graduated to paranoid status, with a bit of the narcissist thrown in. What grand scheme with any self-respect would have as its central figure an innocuous professor and little-known writer? Now, if you were in politics, the military. . . ."

"Like you say, just playing the role," Wakeman muttered.

"By the way--your inventiveness reminds me--Mrs. Greathouse told me that Bruno Gabriel is looking for a screenwriter to work on his new film," said Roberta.

"Gabriel? The director?"

"No, the brick-layer. *The Bastard* was his latest film. Didn't you see it?"

"No" He had not seen any of Gabriel's films. The young director, with the release of *The Bas-*

tard, had just began to make a name for himself in Bonneville. People were now discovering the cult and art films he had been making for years, and he had attracted somewhat of a following. There were rumours always floating around the university and artist community about Gabriel's social life. He had long been a familiar figure in Old City night clubs; now, with increased success, there were monumental drunkennesses, disputes with bar patrons, intense discussions of politics, philosophy and aesthetics that sometimes degenerated into violence. . . .

"Shut-in. Anyway, I told her about you, and she stated she'd tell Gabriel about you and introduce us tonight."

"Well, I don't know"

Wakeman's voice trailed off because his attention was fixed more on the man getting out of the car down the street than on what he was saying. "Damn it, I can't believe he's here. Why didn't you tell me he was coming?"

A young woman had emerged from the opposite side of the car. The couple started in the direction of Mrs. Greathouse's mansion. Light from a street lamp flashed briefly over their features. "I didn't know until just now," Roberta said coldly. She opened the door and got out of the car. The door slammed with an unsatisfying metallic clang.

It was Wharton, Roberta's other lover. Like Roberta and Wakeman, Wharton worked at the University. He was a professor of Literature, like Wakeman. Roberta (an instructor of art) had been seeing him for several weeks when Wakeman found out about them. Wakeman had known and disliked Wharton even before the affair. He had confronted Roberta about Wharton after seeing them together twice. Roberta had matter-of-factly confessed to the affair. Then she took the opportunity to state her views on the subject of her and Wakeman's relationship, which (she observed) had always lacked the element of formal recognition by either of them. He had no right to object to anything in her personal life. Moreover, as she pointed out, he had become a self-absorbed ass. He spent too much time in isolation, and was unnaturally preoccupied with what she termed "existential matters." He was, in a word, disturbed. And that was that.

And that was that. Roberta was right, of course. He was an ass. One of the reasons he was an ass was that things sometimes pissed him off and he didn't quite know why. He wasn't jealous of Roberta and Wharton (as Roberta supposed). No, that would have been too easy. It had more to do with a synchronous chain that had tied Wharton and him absurdly together since their first meeting. In any event, the subject was dropped. Until that night at

Mrs. Greathouse's, Wakeman had not brought it up again, nor had Roberta.

Wakeman opened his door and scrambled out of the car. As he followed Roberta down the street, he slipped into the the vest and cape, and put the mask and beard in his coat pocket. The tall trees lining the street swayed in the darkness above. Ahead, Wharton and the woman turned into the Greathouse driveway. They gave no sign of recognition. Wakeman noted in disgust that Wharton was wearing a black cape similar to his. Wakeman and Roberta followed Wharton and the woman through the main gate and approached the house by way of a floodlit stone walkway. Wakeman hoped he would have no trouble avoiding the detested Wharton.

They entered the foyer and waited as Mrs. Greathouse greeted Wharton and the woman. After a moment the preceeding couple walked on and the hostess approached Wakeman and Roberta with a broad smile. She was a bejewelled and elaborately made-up woman of about sixty. She wore an elegant blue evening gown. "I hear you are employed in one of the city's finest restaurants," she said to Wakeman after introductions.

What?

"No, he's a writer," said Roberta, laughing. "I told you he was a writer, not a waiter."

"Oh, I misunderstood," fluttered Mrs. Greathouse.
"But of course, there is a strong likeness between the two, don't you think?"

At that point a servant approached and announced a telephone call for the hostess, saving Wakeman from having to devise an answer. Before she excused herself Mrs. Greathouse told him that a director named Bruno Gabriel was in attendance at her ball. He was making a film adaptation of a book; perhaps Wakeman could provide the director with some expert insight.

Having been cast adrift, Roberta and Wakeman wandered to a bar. "Martini, dry," Roberta said to the bartender.

"Whiskey and cola," ordered Wakeman.

A long table, laden with *hors d'oeuvres*, stretched down the center of the hall. Above it hung a tremendous chandelier, which lit the huge room rather dimly. On one side of the hall curtains spread over the wall from the distant ceiling to the parquet floor. The parallel wall was embedded with paintings. Near the entrance, in front of the huge picture window, a stage had been erected. On it a disorganized assemblage of instruments and electronic equipment lay. In the opposite direction, the rear of the hall disappeared into an ambiguous gloom. There were tall curtains there as well. A flurry of improvised notes and the stretched chords of jazz flooded from a chamber open-

ing on to the main ballroom.

Roberta and Wakeman wandered through the crowd and stopped in front of the wall of paintings. Wakeman noted a priceless Dan Kinsky. Around the ballroom multitudes of people milled around, most of them in costume. Few of the costumes were particularly interesting: the same ones appeared year after year during Festival. Somewhat intriguing was the tall monk, in long black robe, who seemed to wander aimlessly around the ballroom. The monk carried an outrageous five-foot, pink flourescent, cardboard key. His face was largely hidden in the depths of his cowl.

Two of Roberta's friends had spied her. Wakeman remembered them only by the costumes they were wearing: she was a hideous, rouge-smeared, wart-ridden trollop, he a saint of some sort, complete with sequined halo and white robe.

"We were lucky to get here at all," said the whore, "what with us living in the suburbs and the problems with the trains."

"Problems with the trains?" said Wakeman. "What problems?"

"Haven't you heard?" replied the whore. "First there was a collision in the Crystal Palace. Then--it was in the papers today--there were reports of strange occurrences on the trains themselves." She laughed, nearly

dislodging one of her warts. "It seems time may be non-linear on some of the trains."

"Right," said the saint. "One of the scintillating rumors that typically infest Festival season. That is a new one, though."

Wakeman was about to ask for further details but was interrupted by Roberta. "There's Bruno Gabriel."

"Who?"

"Bruno Gabriel. The director. Over there, talking to Mrs. Greathouse. Let's go sit down on that couch next to them. Maybe Mrs. Greathouse will introduce us next. Hurry, before someone gets our place." Roberta pointed to an immensely long, luxurious couch and started across the room. Wakeman, the whore and the saint followed, the saint tripping over the hem of his robe and loosing his halo. Wakeman stopped to help, an action which prevented him from noting, until it was too late, the simultaneous approach from another sector of the ballroom of Wharton. Just as he sat down on the couch, Wakeman noted Wharton doing the same, at the exact same instant, and in the spot next to his own. It was a synchronous sitting. Wakeman looked quickly over at Wharton, then jerked his head back in fury.

The coincidence made Wakeman so angry he was unable to concentrate on the conversation going on around him.

Why on earth should forces conspire to situate him next to Wharton when there was a ballroom of such epic proportions, stretching away on all sides, to which they could send the creature? Wakeman was tempted to rise and move away, but to do so would be to give away not only his hatred of Wharton, but of the reason for that hatred. And one of the reasons he so despised Wharton was the fact that Wharton, he suspected, glimpsed the reason why he, Wakeman, despised him. He could not get up and move: to do so, after coincidentally sitting down next to Wharton, would prove to Wharton that Wakeman despised him because of coincidence. And Wakeman regarded his hatred of coincidence as his own private neurosis. It was off-limits to everyone else. Oh, sure, other people talked about it, maybe contended with it in their own lives. But they were all too ready to laugh it off. Only he could appreciate its hateful grandeur.

If there was anything on earth Wakeman despised, it was coincidence. If there were some grand design, a mechanism that dictated the movements and confluences of things and events, he would not have found it so maddening. But then there would be no coincidence. In its very nature coincidence was random, meaningless, and unintended. Wakeman's life was filled with its pointless intersections, which complicated his most innocent endeavors

and spoiled his few relations with the world. And of course it was coincidental that a man who hated coincidence so intensely should be so afflicted with it, a fact which fueled the fire of hatred in Wakeman.

Coincidence had everything to do with the reason why Wakeman despised Wharton. The hatred was founded in events of several years back, long before either of their affairs with Roberta. Wharton and he were numbered in a crop of new employees at the University. They had had lunch together that first day, and for the first few weeks greeted each other amiably when meeting around the university. But then, as the months passed and he had no further contacts with the man (the Department of Literature had over a hundred faculty), Wakeman began to wonder why he and Wharton continued to speak. And after a while, every time the pair would meet, Wakeman would be unsure of whether he should speak to Wharton or not. Wakeman thought that Wharton was wondering the same thing: every time their paths crossed, an embarrassing little pause would ensue as both wondered whether to acknowledge the other. After these absurd preliminaries would come the uncertain nods. At length Wakeman began to find the meetings infuriating, and, by this time possessed with hatred of his and Wharton's apparently synchronized movements, he stopped acknowledging Wharton altogether. It

was about that time that the meetings seemed to become more frequent. Wakeman became obsessed with avoiding Wharton; he would vary his route around campus, he would have lunch at different times and locations, but it didn't matter: there was Wharton. Because of the constant coincidence, Wakeman developed a hatred for Wharton himself, though, rationally speaking, the man could hardly be blamed for the forces which sought to coordinate his and Wakeman's movements like they were soldiers marching in lock step to a war that never was. But Wakeman had no other outlet for his passions. Who would listen seriously to a man who claimed he was being driven insane because his movements coincided with those of another?

The worst part of it had developed recently, and it was something that would fuel Wakeman's hatred until it exploded into a raging bonfire. This was the realization, beginning as a mere suspicion but flaring quickly into certainty, that Wharton too hated coincidence! This Wakeman confirmed, in the course of his next few encounters with Wharton, by surreptitious observations of the man's behavior out of the corner of his eye. He felt (more than saw) Wharton start, almost flinch, as the two approached each other, felt the indignation, the contempt the man vomited out of his dark, handsome, loathsome face. This too was of course a goddamned coincidence, the most

maddening one of all, this coincidence of two coincidence-haters working at the same university, running into one another all the time, all for absolutely no reason. No reason. One could ask all day, "why all this simultaneity?" and all one could expect in reply was to stand pissing alone in the men's room and have Wharton--for the third time that day--slide in behind him and march into a stall, slamming the door in a radiant disgust of his own.

And then there was Wharton's affair with Rita, which had driven Wakeman into a mad fury. Jealousy, of course, didn't have anything to do with his feelings. No, that would have been the emotion of a normal man. And Wakeman was not normal. He saw things that others didn't. What maddened him about the affair was--what else?--the damned coincidence of it all. It seemed like the latest episode in a bad serial, in which the few characters are forced into far more intrigues in a year than a real person would have in a lifetime, always with the same small circle of people, just to keep the plot going. If she had to have an affair, why did it have to be with Wharton?

This is why Wakeman hated Wharton, and why he wanted to kill him when the two sat down, their movements synchronized to an oiled perfection, on Mrs. Greathouse's sofa.

While reviewing the history of his conflict with

Wharton, Wakeman sat absently eating *hors d'oeuvres* from the plate he held in his lap. There was a desultory conversation occurring between various occupants of the couch. Mrs. Greathouse stood several feet away, talking to Bruno Gabriel. While engaged in ignoring Wharton, Wakeman absently bent forward and picked up his drink from the coffee table and raised the glass to his lips--actions that were mimed in exactness by Wharton next to him. Wakeman nearly spewed the beverage out of his mouth. How long had it been going on? Wharton's eating was in rhythm to his own! Their very alimentary habits were simultaneous! Wakeman imagined their stomachs churning in unison. He struggled to control himself. He set his plate down on his lap, thinking to refuse to eat any more while Wharton's plate had food on it. But almost immediately, Wharton also set his plate down. It was not as if the man was consciously mimicking him; he was talking to the guest on his other side and was clearly unaware of Wakeman's movements. But this was precisely what infuriated Wakeman: there was no intent to the synchronicity, it just happened. Slapped yet again with proof of the absurd workings of the world, Wakeman lost the patience to outwait Wharton, and as surreptitiously as possible, raised his fork, speared a piece of cheese, and popped it into his mouth. But even as he did so, he noticed his mistake:

as each second passed, it became more and more likely that Wharton, having not eaten anything for several seconds, would seize the instant also to snatch his own morsel. And fork it, much to Wakeman's outrage, he did, his silver instrument flashing in concert with Wakeman's own. Wakeman was nearly beside himself, so much so that he quite forgot the occasion, leaned forward, and looking directly at Wharton, hammered the coffee table once loudly with the butt of his fork. The impact set some drinks to quivering, and several pieces of candy fell out of a dish.

A hush fell over the nearby space. The other occupants of the couch were staring at Wakeman. "Oh, God," muttered Roberta. "What fresh hell is this?"

Wakeman looked at the faces staring at him in various stages of mirth and surprise. And then the developing coincidence, previously so real, shattered, and Wakeman saw how silly he appeared. And of course there was no question of explaining the reason for his outburst. Wakeman could just hear it. "Wharton was eating in rhythm with me," he would say.

But there did seem to be some demand for explanation. "Uh, there was an insect on the table," he said. "It was scurrying along and I tried to kill it. A roach."

Then he heard a gasp. Turning, he saw Mrs. Great-house standing next to him. Evidently, she had approached

with the intention of introducing him to the director who stood grinning now at her side. She was holding her hand to her mouth and her wide eyes were staring down into his own. Two or three snorts and titters were emitted from down the couch. Wakeman felt a sharp jab in his ribs and Roberta's whisper rasped in his ear, "Of all things, Thomas! How could you!"

Then Roberta shot to her feet and into action. "Thomas has a strange sense of humor, Mrs. Greathouse. There was no roach on your table. How unthinkable! You just have to get used to him. Everyone thinks he's a little weird." She concluded by tapping her forefinger to the side of her head.

"I . . . well. I just wanted to introduce Mr. Gabriel," said the matron. "Knowing that, uh, he was a novelist, I thought he might provide some insight into the book this young man is adapting to film."

"Yes, yes, it is Mr. Gabriel," said Roberta. "I saw the television interview with you the other day, Mr. Gabriel. I think your films are wonderful! I'm Roberta Gradapple. And this is Thomas Wakeman." As she was saying this, Roberta's hand was feeling around behind her. Eventually she grasped Wakeman's shirt sleeve and hauled Wakeman up behind her.

"Nice to meet you," said Gabriel. The director

looked at Wakeman with piercing black eyes and laughed. "A brilliant idea to consult you, considering I haven't even read the book! Moreover, I like to talk with fellow artists. Shall we go into the lounge and have a drink?" He took Wakeman's arm, and guided the dazed Wakeman from the scene of the *faux pas*.

"So you come striding among us, bearing the glass that forms and reflects," Gabriel said as they entered the lounge. He guided Wakeman past a wall on which hung several abstract paintings. He had something to say about each of them. "Splendid! A perfect world of its own!" A jazz combo played at the far end of the room. There were just a few people in the room, jazz freaks mostly by the look of them, crowded in front of the combo. Wakeman, Gabriel, and Roberta sat down on a couch in a small alcove. Shortly, Roberta's friends--the whore and the saint--followed. While Roberta talked to Gabriel about *The Bastard*, the director pulled a little golden pipe out of one pocket and an embroidered cloth sack out of another. He tapped a chunk of hashish out of the bag into the pipe.

"A philosopher once said adventure occurs only in retrospect," said Gabriel. "He must not have tried this. Anyone mind?"

No one did, and soon the room was sweet with the

scent of burning hashish.

"Yes, music and painting," said Gabriel, peering at Wakeman. "The two greatest arts. They stand as rebukes to us who traffic in words and ideas, don't you think?" Gabriel sat on the edge of the couch. His black eyes sparkled through the smoke that wreathed his face.

Gabriel seemed to take the fact that he, Roberta, and Wakeman were all artists of various sorts, combined with their physical proximity to both music and paintings, as a signal to extemporize on the subject of art and its various subdivisions.

"It's the words that degrade our arts and make them in part sordid rhetoric and ideas," he said. "Have you learned to beware the black pit of ideas? Someone once said: 'all art aspires to the condition of music.' No words, no ideas, no people! The only subject of music is music itself. It exists as an impregnable kingdom surrounded by an ocean--a sewer--of ideas and words. But even music has its downfall, which is time. The notes reach out and grab time and organize it, but--time has the last word: it leaks into the machinery of the music, a non-corporeal lubricant of incalculable slickness. Music is denied the stasis of the present and the final expression of essence. A philosopher named Saint Augustine said that the present is a blade of infinite thinness. On one

side of the blade is all that which does not yet exist; on the other is all that which is no longer. Therefore existence is hardly possible, because there is no time for it! Consider: in our arts, in music you simultaneously flee a flood and seek high ground. You are propelled ahead by the rising waters, like a leaf in a powerful stream. You see a high spot ahead, a beautiful island of solid stone, from which you will stop and survey the flood. Or you may be cast upon it unexpectedly. Whatever the case, you are swept to the island, you reach it, but it is instantly engulfed and you see it is a mere stepping stone. Ahead are other islands, each of which when you reach it you find offers nothing more permanent than a foothold from which you may jump to the next stone. And at last the flood ebbs and you look back at the labyrinth of islands and you see they've been washed away . . . and what is left? Images, illusions; you see there was no flood after all, just a dream. You reach out for the essence of the thing, and it dissolves before your eyes." Gabriel was making motions as if the scene he described was somewhere out in front of him. He laughed and continued after a moment, his next words being obscured by a jazz improvisation that seemed to be reaching a climax of its own: "It's . . . like life, no?" he was saying. "Now painting is a whole other matter, the only art that hasn't

fallen from Being into time. The greatest of the arts! Painting combines the wordlessness of music with a defiance of time. One can say a painting truly exists, as more than a mere concept. And what, at the same instant in which that painting on the wall over there exists--in its entirety--do we have of your novel or my film, or for that matter, that jazz performance? A memory, a promise!"

Roberta interjected at this point, "As a painter, I appreciate your sentiments."

"But perhaps they are simplistic. What has our other purveyor of narrative to say on the matter?" said Gabriel, turning back to Wakeman. "What is the true relation of art and time?"

Wakeman stared at Gabriel in amazement. The director was a man possessed by conversation. How could he say anything to measure up to such an oration?

"Well . . . that which exists through time has its own lodestone, which is the fact that it *is* a dream," Wakeman replied, "and thus scarcely exists. Perhaps time varies according to the object and the crucial element is the sharpness of St. Augustine's blade: for some things the present is wider, for others it is narrower. That which exists on the edge of a sharp temporal blade is of a finer essence, because its existence is minimal."

"Ah," said Gabriel. "Which explains fat people and

thin people. I want to tell my brother's wife, who weighs two hundred and eighty pounds, that she has too much present in her life! But perhaps the illusion after all is traveling the labyrinth I spoke of. Maybe there is only the lone, crystalline instant, and the novel, the symphony, never existed in the first place. The labyrinth cannot disappear, because it is not there."

Roberta asked Gabriel something about his next film.

Gabriel laughed and spread his hands out before him. "How should I know? I haven't begun writing the script! All I know is that it's to be based on a novel. Actually, the film is in the very earliest stages of production, and was conceived under the most unusual circumstances. I have met no one in connection with it. The negotiations were carried out by mail and over the telephone with the producer. Almost a month ago, I received a call from Anne Wilde, who has produced such excellent films as *The Reckoning* and *Speed of Light*. She told me she was putting together a film of a novel set in Bonneville, and that she wanted to use a local director. She said that she had enjoyed *The Bastard*, and thought that my style was right for the film. Unfortunately, I am not the only up-and-coming young local director whose style Wilde enjoys. She has also contacted Frank Arsewine, the ex-convict and publicly-admitted nihilist, on the strength of his film

The Myth. It seems that there's a bit of a contest on: whoever can come up with the best screenplay in the next two weeks will have the film. I rather dislike the competition, but what an opportunity! The budgets Wilde can deliver will attract top-name actors. So the film has the potential of becoming a major box-office attraction, and of elevating the career of a little-known provincial maker of art and cult films into the professional ionosphere."

"What's the title of the novel?" said Roberta, who was busily engaged with a tray of *hors d'oeuvres* on the table in front of her.

The Circular Gardens. The author is Fourier, Paul Fourier. We're to shoot the film in Mount Immanuel, right below his estate. Supposedly, the novel is set there."

Wakeman's attention had been wavering. He had been engrossed with Roberta's *hors d'oeuvre* consumption, which he regarded with some disgust, but with the mention of *The Circular Gardens* and Fourier he sat up straight. What kind of crazy mixup was he involved in now? Paul Fourier, who existed only in his fiction, the author of *The Circular Gardens*? A long-held figment of his imagination a real man? *The Circular Gardens*, his creation, written and published by an inhabitant of his own fictional universe? Stupendous! The "novel" was no more than a fragment, filling scarcely eight pages on his computer screen!

Mentally, Wakeman shook his head and wrestled his attention back to Gabriel. He would just have to examine the issue in depth when he could concentrate sufficiently to make sense of it. Moreover, a plausible explanation would no doubt evidence itself in Gabriel's continuing account of the film's background. Reassuring himself this way, Wakeman managed to clear his mind but for one nagging suspicion: that this whole preposterous Fourier business revolved around his sleepwalking in the Crystal Palace.

"Making a film in that part of Mount Immanuel will be an adventure," Gabriel was saying. "It's largely crumbling and unsafe. We'll have to get a permit to shoot there. It may be an engineering nightmare for the studio, but Wilde seems not the least concerned with such problems, or the expenses that go with them. A very titillating situation."

Wakeman had long been fascinated by the sector of narrow, labyrinthine streets surrounding the Mount Immanuel estate and encircling the mountain below it. If it had not been unsafe, as the director had said, he might well have looked for an apartment there. "Mount Immanuel" was the name of both a mountain and an urban district, the latter being one of the oldest and most picturesque sectors of Bonneville, a patchwork of old stone and brick houses built on the flanks of the city's highest point.

The mountain itself was a topographical oddity, an extinct volcanic cone that rose gradually near the valley floor, but finished its ascent in a radically steep incline. Though it was nowhere near as high of the peaks of the nearby Ramparts, it was of an impressive elevation, dwarfing all but the highest skyscrapers in the commercial district. Houses were packed together all up and down the mountain, making the district the most built-up of all Bonneville's. It was also the most densely populated, except for its uppermost and steepest section, which had been evacuated after a severe earthquake a few years back. During that disaster, part of the hill had collapsed, destroying a score of dwellings, damaging many more, and killing and injuring many hundreds.

Gabriel was speaking. "Wilde put me in touch with a fellow who has since acted as my tour guide. He lives on the mountain with his parents, who are two of only a few residents who refuse to move. The tour he conducted for me both encouraged and discouraged me. There are no real facilities for the project. Electrical hookups are problematic, streets end in piles of rubble or disappear in defiles made by the earthquake. . . . In fact, there is nothing, except empty houses *ad infinitum*. It is almost ghostly, climbing the deserted, twisting streets through row after row of crumbling old stone buildings with their

blank windows and inscrutable gray facades, hearing nothing but the faint noises of the traffic in the city below and the tap of your own footsteps. But it is very atmospheric."

Buildings and more buildings, thought Wakeman. A proliferation of them, a broad swath of gleaming white and yellow squares and rectangles, divided by a crazy network of narrow streets and alleys which hung above the rest of the city like a giant map of itself. Only the almost vertical uppermost portion of the hill was clear of buildings and streets. This band of exposed rock--approximately two hundred feet wide--was too steep to build on. It separated the city district from a green expanse on the summit of the mountain, on which perched an estate of approximately five acres. A tremendous mansion, one of the city's most notable landmarks, crowned the summit. The mansion had gazed down on the city for centuries, and had been the residence of a variety of politicians, newspapermen, criminals, artists, and businessmen. Then, years ago, its owners abandoned it after financial reversals. Following were decades of decay and inattention, during which time the small forest on the summit had grown up around the palace. All that was visible of the edifice now was its massive, doric-columned, Greek revival style veranda.

"Of course, I've never been to the estate," Gabriel was saying. "In fact, I don't know anyone who has. Perhaps I'll be invited to it at some point to meet Fourier, but I'm beginning to have my doubts. Wilde intimated that Fourier is eccentric, rarely sees anyone, and is in any event usually not at home. Moreover, it seems that, because of the earthquake, there is no way to the top of the peak except by helicopter. Unless, that is, you don't mind climbing over mountains of rubble. Wilde says that even supplies have to be taken up in Fourier's helicopter."

"Well, at least I know who lives there now," said Roberta's friend the whore, who had been silent until now. "The estate has such an illustrious history. For the longest time, no one knew who owned it, and it seemed a shame that such an imposing structure, sitting above the city like that, should be so . . . vacant."

"Yes, it's nice to see it lighted at night," said the director. "At night it seems to hang in the air . . . somewhat like the film." Gabriel laughed and sat back on the couch. "What do I have to show for two weeks on this project? Absolutely nothing. I can't even proceed in writing the script, because, incredibly, I can't get a copy of the damn novel!"

"I've heard of that novel. At one time I had planned

to read it," said Roberta.

Gabriel threw up his hands. "That's what I hear everywhere! Everyone, it seems, has heard of the book but no one has read it or knows anyone who has. I've reminded Wilde on two occasions to provide me a copy, but I've gotten nothing. A very puzzling situation. But of course with the trouble in Westonia, communications and mail are erratic: I suppose Wilde can be excused. I just hope that Arswine is having the same problem. Nor will anyone give me one scrap of information about Fourier that might enlighten me about his absurd novel. Tell me, should I hire a detective? The only information I have to operate on is that which I was able to extract, like a stubborn tooth, from the agent: the book, it seems, is about a man who wakes up one morning and finds the gaze of a dark and enigmatical force directed on him, and who then goes in search of the central meaning of his existence. I may have to fly to Westonia before it's all over and visit Fourier's publisher, or the Library of Parliament."

Wakeman had been staring out into space, searching his mind for possible answers. He looked up to find Gabriel staring at him. Did the director know more than he was telling?

"But all this time I've been ignoring the man who would most be likely to tell me about the book and its

author," said Gabriel.

There was a pause. Then Wakeman replied, "Not much to tell, really. Obscure sort of chap. Never met him. No one knows anything about him personally. Brilliant writer, though."

"Then you've read *The Circular Gardens*," said Gabriel.

"Bits and snatches," said Wakeman. "Brilliant."

"Enough to help me get started on the film?" said Gabriel. "I have a budget lying mostly unused. I'll need a screenwriter."

Wakeman hardly knew how to answer. He needed to go somewhere and sort things out. . . . But didn't he really want to help the director? Hadn't he told the last little white lies to lead Gabriel into thinking he was more of an authority than he really was? It would be interesting to work with this man, who seemed so charged with an energy that he, Wakeman, had lacked for years. Not to mention an honor. And a film credit to his name would advance his career immeasurably: he would sell more books, and would attract more esteem in the department.

"Are you sure you need a screenwriter and not a waiter?" he said.

"Ha! Mrs. Greathouse cleared that up with me before our introduction. Yes, yes. I need a screenwriter. And

I'm not asking you as a mere impulse. You are more known to me than I, perhaps, am to you. You see, I read one of your books several years ago. *A Labyrinth of Lives*. I liked it very much. Stylistically, you could be an important influence on this film."

"I'm flattered," replied Wakeman. "I have responsibilities at the university, though. Two classes this term. But perhaps I could call you, talk to you about the project in a more appropriate setting."

Gabriel stood up, beaming. "Not only call, but be welcomed as an esteemed visitor on the set-to-be! Can you come tomorrow? No, not tomorrow. Tuesday?"

Wakeman hesitated. "Well, I have class that day. . . ."

"I must have the script ready in two weeks. . . ."

Wakeman noticed out of the corner of his eye that Roberta was fidgeting. "We'll be there," she said.

Most of the rest of the evening came back to Wakeman days later as a surreal smear of images; Gabriel's hashish was some of most potent he'd ever sampled. Gabriel tapped the residue from his golden pipe and proposed that everyone enter the main ballroom, where a band was playing.

Wakeman, Gabriel, Roberta, the whore and the saint giggled in a hashish-induced conspiracy as they almost

stumbled into the great hall. Wakeman and Gabriel pushed their way to a position in front of the stage. An inscription on the bass drum announced that the band playing were the True Bohemians. The first number had just begun, a fast, rhythmic piece that began as an instrumental. Then a young woman walked from the back of the stage up to a microphone and began singing. Wakeman stared up at the girl in fascination. It came on suddenly--. Where had he seen her before? What was it about her that had attracted his attention? It was not beauty (though she was pretty)--rather it was a certain permeability of form, an aura of wholeness, an insubstantial radiance. My word, thought Wakeman, Gabriel's hashish was potent!

The song's vocal section was superseded by another instrumental break, and the girl moved to the back of the stage. From there she looked over the drums out at the audience. Her black eyes played over the ballroom and the dancers (an icy gaze, traveling over the surfaces of things) then met Wakeman's gaze and held it. The look seemed to Wakeman to acknowledge a kind of primitive acquaintance. . . .

Then someone seized Wakeman's arm and spun him around. It was a washer woman, complete with mop, and she was inviting Wakeman to dance. Wakeman backed away, mouthing over the music that his foot was injured, though

the truth was that he disliked dancing. The woman whirled away on the tide of dancers, mopping the floor. The True Bohemians followed the first number with a similarly fast, rhythmic one, after which there was a momentary break. Then the band hesitated its way into a quirky, repeating riff. For a long time afterward it seemed that an airy sonic labyrinth was being spun out of the speakers on either side of the stage. The bass and guitar, bonded delicately together by the crisp, metric tap-tap of the drums, repeated the fragile riff over and over. The entire song, Wakeman realized, was performed in one hypnotic key. In its higher planes the tensile, symphonic chords of the synthesizer drifted in great icy sheets, melding with the vocalist's silk soprano somewhere in the haze of smoke above. Wakeman could not distinguish the song's lyrics, and didn't care. The vocalist stood motionless, framed by the picture window and the stars, and then gazed up at the chandelier as if enraptured by the music. Her black eyes became cubes of polished obsidian. Dancers swirled over the marble floor; angels, royalty, famous people from the past and present glided as if on ice. Wakeman walked over to the bar and ordered a vodka tonic (clear and sparkling) and returned to the stage and handed it to the vocalist. The keyboard player was now soloing: his synthesizer exuded a thick, elastic stream of

notes that wound up and up toward the chandelier, stretching its bonds with the repeating riff below. The girl extended her arm and took the drink and Wakeman saw an electric spark as it flashed from her fingernails to the ice cubes and thence to his outstretched hand.

Wakeman was in near ecstasy at this point, but this state was not to last much longer. Like dream melding slowly into dream, the evening began to metamorphose toward the strange. He retreated from the stage and began watching the band from the security of the bar. There, he had two more drinks. Soon he was as drunk as everyone else at the party. And the effects of the hashish seemed to intensify. He drank some more, to counteract the hashish. The music began to come at him from the stage in a pulsing, silver bulge, and seemed somehow intermeshed with the progressing ball, as if the two were inseparable partners in a dance through time. Wakeman felt as if he were about to start hallucinating, a sensation amplified by the arrival of a new group of party-comers in costume. An assortment of royal personages and pagan deities joined those already on the dance floor. Then it occurred to Wakeman that he had lost Roberta. He started looking around for her among the dancers. She was nowhere in sight, so he wandered around the ballroom and the several ancillary chambers. The jazz group had stopped playing,

and the chamber it had played in was deserted. He wandered toward the rear of the ballroom, and eventually came to a door out of which blasted the most primeval sort of rock music. The music seemed to be coming from a room down the dark hall. Curious, Wakeman walked down the corridor and stopped in front of a curtained door. Above the door was a sign. It read: "The Den of Dionysus." Wakeman parted the curtains that hung over the doorway and stepped in.

The first thing that hit him was the sensation of being bathed in red; the furniture and curtains were crimson; in a tremendous fire-place at the end of the room flamed a towering fire. The room was lit by a myriad of red candles in an enormous candelabra on a table in the center of the room. The flicker of the candles, along with the fire, lent the room the appearance of constant, wobbling mutation. There were scores of people in the room. The prevailing costume theme seemed to be that of the devil. In one corner people were dancing to the music of a rock group in a mass of flailing arms, tossed manes of hair, and slamming bodies. The room looked like a Hieronymous Bosch painting. The reek of marijuana stung Wakeman's nostrils and someone poked him on the arm and passed him a joint. It was Gabriel; his face was red with the redness of the room and the marijuana. He smiled and

turned back to a man he'd been talking with. As Wakeman walked further into the room he could see that the bartenders were topless, both men and women. Beyond the bar was a smaller chamber, lit mainly by two torches placed on the wall on both sides of an amateurish-looking statue. It was a statue of Dionysus, painted red, complete with a tremendous papier-mache erection that thrust out like a gesture of benediction on the scene below. Wakeman's eyes having gotten adjusted to the dimness, he saw the floor was covered by lush carpets and huge satin pillows. Amidst the pillows were a dozen or so pairs, and trios and even quartets of naked, writhing bodies. From a body on the carpet directly in front of Wakeman, a hand reached up for his crotch.

Wakeman felt a sharp pain in his fingers. He looked down and saw that he still held the joint, and that it had burned almost away. He passed the hand the roach instead of his crotch and backed away from the spectacle, his face burning as crimson as the furniture. He found himself again in the Den's anterior chamber. The rock band was jumping around on their small stage as if caught in the thralls of a powerful electric current. On the dance floor in front of them, the dancers had joined hands and were spinning around in a dizzying circle. Wakeman watched in amazement and a degree of horror: where had he

seen this same insane dance? As if in response to these sensations he felt a poke on his shoulder and heard someone yelling in his ear. It was Gabriel again and he was yelling something about a comet and a cult. The band drowned out the rest of what he said; Wakeman held his hands up to his ears. Gabriel grinned, took out a pen and paper and wrote Wakeman a note. "Going now. Come Tuesday at three. Meet at Stromberg and Perugia." He waved and walked away. A sudden sick feeling of pointless surplus then surged up in Wakeman. He turned and walked toward the door into the main hall. On his way out, he saw Roberta standing in a far corner. She was talking to a man. They were smoking cigarettes, the burning ends of which made fire-tracers in the air as they gestured to one another. As Wakeman tip-toed over some spilled food and made his way toward them, he saw the man was Wharton. For the first time since Wakeman had found out about the affair, he felt jealousy. It was an unfamiliar sensation, hot and ugly. (Perhaps it was the just the alcohol and hashish, he thought.) As he watched, Wharton and Roberta kissed, for several seconds. Roberta was facing Wakeman; as the kiss proceeded, she raised her eyes and looked over at him. Her face assumed a drunken, petulant expression. Her eyes reflected the candles and the fire and looked like red-hot coals. She looked old and depraved.

Wakeman left the room in disgust. He wanted to leave, but suddenly he was almost too drunk to do so. All evening he had been depending on Roberta to take him home, an eventuality he now rejected in anger. He returned to the main hall and stumbled past the stage and into the mansion's foyer. The True Bohemians were taking a break and their stage was empty. He found a servant and gave him the coat check number, then walked over to a phone on a desk. He called a cab.

As Wakeman was putting on his coat, he felt a bulge somewhere within the garment. He reached inside and pulled out the fake beard and mask. He laughed derisively. Ah, the new identity. He'd almost forgotten. Now he could be anonymous and crazy; anonymously crazy; crazily anonymous. Maybe he would do something antisocial. He found a restroom just off the foyer. He entered it Wakeman, employed the mirror to don the mask and beard, and exited a lunatic. Now what could he do to contribute, under his new guise, to the evening's general air of abandon? He would have to be quick, though: the cab would arrive soon.

But Wakeman's state of extreme intoxication made any such action difficult. The alcohol motivated him toward doing something outrageous, at least mischievous; the hashish made him tentative and his surroundings strange.

Thus he stood, bearded, masked, and indecisive, leaning against a wall.

It was in this state that Wakeman saw a small old man with a beard enter the mansion. His only costume was a black mask. He looked around for a minute, his eyes becoming adjusted to the bright light of the foyer. Then he looked directly at Wakeman and walked over.

"Ah, there you are, costumed just as you said you'd be," he said. "Have you seen him?"

"Seen who?"

"The escapee, of course. Who else? Too bad this had to happen during the Festival season. He could be at any of a hundred balls."

"Uh, who are you anyway?"

"Hoffman! . . . But . . . you are . . . but, well. . . ."

"Hoffman! Ecchh!" said Wakeman, throwing himself forward from the wall he was leaning on and hurrying toward the door. *Hoffman*. The name of one of the doctors in the fragment. Old and bearded.

Wakeman stopped and looked behind him through the mansion's front door. The old man was still standing there, peering out the door, hands on hips. To hell with the cab. Wakeman began jogging toward the nearest transit station.

CHAPTER THREE

The Greathouse Mansion lay only a few blocks from the nearest transit station. Wakeman had run most of the distance, and had arrived in the the station in just enough time to catch a train. A few costumed revellers exited the turnstile just as he entered. The door slid shut behind him just as he stepped into the car. He slid breathlessly into a seat. The car was nearly empty; most of Bonneville's revelers were already reveling at the scores of balls that lit the city in swirls of multicolored lights, wandering promiscuously from one to the other; the cars would not fill again until two or three in the morning.

Hoffman! Why had he panicked at the mention of the name? True, Hoffman was the name of one of the doctors in the novel fragment at home. But it was also the name of an important segment of Bonneville's population: the Hoffmans! Of course, both Hoffman in the novel and Hoffman at the ball had both had beards--yet couldn't the beard of the latter have been false? And why couldn't *many* Hoffmans--the actual, live ones--have beards?

Wakeman reasoned himself into a state of comparative relaxation. His flight had been ridiculous, the impulse of a man intoxicated by both alcohol and cannabis. And

what cannabis! What had been in that hashish of Gabriel's, anyway? He collapsed onto the hard seat-back. The car had accelerated to cruising speed and dipped down into a tunnel. In actuality the train was carrying him further and further from his apartment. But given the circular architecture of Bonneville's mass transit system, it didn't matter. In fact, one would have a hard time getting lost on the system: all trains travelled in the same direction, and all tracks intersected in the Crystal Palace. One had only to hop a train, and if not pressed for time, relax--one would sooner or later wind up in the great central terminal. There one could go about navigating the labyrinthine corridors, tunnels, conveyor belts, and suspended walkways to the correct train platform. At that point one would embark on the train to the station closest to one's home. The system was particularly easy for Wakeman to master: his apartment was a mere five minute walk from the Crystal Palace. He never had to worry about connecting trains when going home.

Now, had the name been not Hoffman but Godsmark, Falsetti or Fatimata, Wakeman thought, he might have cause to run away as he had. But even then, the more proper reaction would be one of amazement, not one of alarm. After all, the names had been part of a book. And what did he have to fear from a book? So what if the names

were coincidental? One was fiction, one was fact, and the two did not intermingle.

But why was he telling himself such elementary truths? Why did he need this reassurance, these near platitudes that might have been more suitably offered a child? Perhaps it was the season that was affecting him, the time of year when the real and the imagined sought to merge in the Festival, when Bonneville brimmed with gods, famous politicians, film idols, washerwomen and whores, throngs of them intermingling and spilling from quarter to quarter in Dionysian abandonment. A season in which each evening was a time for shape-shifting, the assumption of new identities, the living out of fantasies, was ideally conducive to the existential dizziness he was going through.

The train was slowing. Wakeman looked at the map on the wall. Each car in the system was equipped with a map of the route or routes it served. This one ran on circle one, the innermost of the routes, serving the St. Superflua district, the edge of the commercial district, and an area of the Old City. The stop coming up was St. Superflua itself.

As the car hissed to a stop Wakeman felt a trembling uncharacteristic of the well-maintained transit cars. And even after the car halted the trembling continued. Then

it intensified and Wakeman was jarred from one side of the seat to another, the windows and doors rattled, and bits of loose debris fell down from the roof of the tunnel. Finally the shaking stopped and Wakeman looked around in relief. There was no apparent damage to the car or the tunnel.

Apparently, an earthquake had rattled the city. This was nothing particularly new: Bonneville sat astride a fault line. Numerous small earthquakes occurred throughout a decade's time, and a big one had flattened portions of the Old City only two years ago. This one, Wakeman thought, seemed to have been rather stronger than minor, but no major cataclysm either. If there were damage, he would no doubt observe it on his walk home from the Crystal Palace.

Yet the car stood still, long after it should have resumed motion. Then an electronic sign at the front of the car blinked out the message: Temporary Delay--20 Minutes.

Wakeman sighed. He would be stranded, with nothing to do. It would have taken less than that twenty minutes to roll in to the Crystal Palace. And the urge to urinate was growing stronger by the second.

Wakeman got up and disembarked the train, intending to seek a restroom in St. Superflua. Perhaps he would

find one not far from the tunnel entrance. Wakeman walked down the tunnel and opened the glass door of the hospital entrance. A cursory glance was enough to determine he would have to look elsewhere for a restroom: the entrance was no more than small lobby with a line of elevators and a public phone. Wakeman boarded a waiting elevator. Its doors hesitated and closed shakily behind him. Had the conveyance been damaged by the quake? Had he not been a fool, given the earthquake, to board it rather than climb the stairs to the first floor? Wakeman's hand darted to the control pannel, then hung suspended as he searched for the Door Open button. As usual, he could not find the correct button. The elevator was moving upwards by then--albeit hesitantly--so Wakeman gave up and pushed the 1 button. But the elevator did not obey his command. He looked up at the floor indicator and saw that the elevator had already passed the first floor. Someone above had summoned the elevator before he had pushed the 1 button, and he would have no alternative but to ride up, and then down. It was not until the elevator had stopped at the seventh floor that it occurred to Wakeman that it had not, indeed, been necessary to ride all the way up: he could have stopped the conveyance anywhere above the first floor if he had had the mere presence of mind to push the button.

But his senses were on fire from the liquor and Gabriel's hashish and it was a wonder he was able to function at all. More importantly, the fullness of his bladder had reached crisis proportions. The elevator doors had no sooner opened than Wakeman flew out and hurried down a corridor, toward a lighted mens' room sign. The two nurses waiting for the elevator looked at him in alarm, then in amusement as he hurried past.

He stood at the wash basin, washing his hands. The piss had been glorious, almost worth the wait. The sensation of relief was so powerful that it washed over him orgasm-like, and his vision swam with myriad dancing colored particles. Again, he was near hallucination. He looked into the mirror. The beard, mask and cape! No wonder the nurses had looked at him suspiciously. The tore off the costume, wadded it up and stuffed it into his coat pocket. He looked again at the mirror. His face had taken on a geographic quality, as if it was a planet. His eyes seemed to peer out of the depths of the cosmos. He became so absorbed in his appearance that when the door opened he jerked up and splattered water all over himself. A fat little man in white coat walked in, glared suspiciously at Wakeman, and walked up to the urinal.

Wakeman dried his hands and stepped back out into the hall. He turned away from the direction he'd come. He

had hatched a plan. We would walk to the far extremity of St. Superflua, where there was another transit station. The place was so huge that it was served by two transit lines, one at each end. There was no way of determining when the train he'd come in on would move; the other line might be out of service too, of course, but what else did he have to do?

Wakeman had not voluntarily ascended to the floor occupied by the Mental Ward. Indeed, he had no knowledge of the ward or its location within the hospital. Thus it was with a sensation of surprise that he first saw the sign: *Psychiatric Ward*, with its arrow pointing in the direction of the transit station. Apparently, he would walk right by the place.

The hall stretched out before him. Far ahead, a figure in white uniform walked out of a side door and then through a set of double doors. Dimly, Wakeman could make out yet another interminable stretch of corridor beyond the doors. Closer by, a janitor walked out of a room, took a key from a chain on his belt, and opened a closet. As he passed the room, Wakeman detected a chemical odor.

At length, Wakeman reached the double doors. He cracked them open a few inches and looked through. More corridor, ending far away in another double door. How far would he have to walk to reach the area above the transit

station? He steeled himself: the hospital was the third largest of Bonneville's structures, smaller only than the Crystal Palace and the Metropolitan Museum. It was larger even than the Provincial House of Government. Moreover, it was much longer than it was high. What the place needed was a people-mover like the one in the Crystal Palace, thought Wakeman. He would spend more time walking from transit station to transit station than he would have if he had just returned to the train he'd come in on.

"Excuse me," said a woman behind him. He looked around. The woman was pushing a cart.

"What?" He had not heard her approach.

"You're blocking the way, sir," said the woman. "Can I get through?"

"Oh! Oh, sure. Sorry. . . ." He had been standing at the door, holding it open like a fool, gaping in indecision. He shook his head and followed the attendant down the hall. At length she passed into a room from which hot air poured. A laundry, it appeared. Wakeman walked on, his pace growing steadily slower.

The corridor was silent. All Wakeman could hear was the tread of his shoes on the carpet. Each step seemed interminable. Why was he walking stealthily? Or was he? Had the immensity of the place, intensified by the hashish, made him feel dwarfed? Whatever it was, with the

closing of the double doors behind him, Wakeman felt he was in a new and strange realm, and feared that he was trespassing. Should he even be in such reaches of the hospital this late at night? He stopped, considering turning around, but at that moment a voice sounded over the Public Address. Yet it sounded far away, and he could not make out the words. Was he hallucinating, hearing voices? The voice continued, very softly. *Doctors . . . ward . . . North . . . blonde . . .* None of it made sense. He had begun walking again, unconsciously. Ahead, a patient walked out of a room, rolling a suspended I.V. bag beside him. He stuck a cigarette into his mouth, opened a door and disappeared. On the opposite side of the hall--he could see it now--several people stood in separate doorways. Slowly, now. As he floated up to the first woman she smiled at him out of a face suddenly caked with makeup. "Festival . . ." was her only word, and it echoed and sounded strangely distorted to Wakeman. The woman backed away into a dark room. Two women looked out of the next room at him. One had placed her hand on the other's shoulder, and both were looking closely at him. Yet they were not looking at him, but at something down the hall. He turned, but there was nothing. Turning back, the women were gone. In another room, a dim light, the lower extremities of a form prone on the bed. Some-

thing made him stop by the door. From the room a low moan, a whispering, "come . . . come. . . ." He had to see. A faucet dripped--drip . . . drip, a clock ticking . . . he had to see . . . floating, inching into the room . . . was he going to. . . .

Wakeman turned and rushed out of the room. What had come over him? It was like an obsession without object. He had to get out of the hospital. He felt he was going insane. He had to get home. He started for the far double doors, but stopped suddenly when he realized that somehow he had exited the hospital room into what appeared to be a waiting room, but without furniture. Were the doors colored, or was he just imagining they were? It was impossible to tell: there was no doubt but that he was actively hallucinating and that the visions were about to take over. Without consciousness of his movements he found himself facing one of the doors, supporting himself with one hand on the doorjam. Was the door red? Who cared?--he had the power now to make it any color he liked. Therefore it was red. And what more appropriate color? After all, it was Festival time in the city!

"Hey, hey, hey."

Wakeman opened his eyes, then sat up in alarm. He had been trying to awake for what seemed hours: a dull

pain in his buttocks summoned him and the bright light and movement in the room were foreign.

Then had come the yelling.

Obviously, he had not awakened in his bedroom. Instead, he lay on a bed in what appeared to be a hospital ward. The room was bare except for four beds besides his own. The only other occupied bed supported a man covered save for his head by a sheet. The man was looking at Wakeman curiously. The mouth gaped open, revealing a sparse collection of yellowing teeth and stretching somewhat the otherwise flaccid, leathery skin of the face. A forest of graying stubble spread upward from the neck nearly to the single eye, out of which radiated an expression of indiscriminating orneriness.

"Hey," the man said. A guttural croak.

Wakeman sat up and nodded. "Hey," he replied.

"Hey, hey," rejoined the man.

Wakeman attempted to smile. "How are you," he muttered.

"Hey hey hey hey hey hey hey hey hey," yelled the man.

Wakeman forced himself to look once more at the man. This time he saw the leather restraints hanging out from under the sheets. Alas, there was no use delaying the obvious. He had known intuitively since he had first

opened his eyes where he was. Now, as the previous evening loomed up in his memory, he admitted it consciously to himself. He had to find someone to get him out of here. What a ghastly mistake. Why was he wearing pajamas? Where were his clothes?

Wakeman hurried over to a door he expected to be locked. It opened when he pushed on it and then he was standing in a short hallway outside of a nurses' station. A large blond nurse of late middle age sat on a counter in the station. She had her shoes off and was cutting her toenails. Several men lounged around, smoking and talking.

"Yyyeeesss?" said the nurse without looking up.

"There's been some kind of mistake," said Wakeman.

"I don't need to be here."

A man slouching down in a chair looked up at the ceiling and exhaled a cloud of smoke. "That tune sounds familiar. Where have I heard it before?"

"Look," said Wakeman. "It's Festival time, right? You've got to get a lot in this time of the year. So I was drunk. I wouldn't have even come here if that earthquake hadn't stalled the train I was on."

"Well, water over the dam," said the nurse. She finished her toenails, put her shoes back on, and slid down off the counter. "It looks like you'll be here for a

few days, anyway."

"A few days!" exploded Wakeman. "I have to get back to work! Look here. Get me my clothes right now. You can't just lock someone up like that."

"You can if the doctor follows certain procedures," said one of the men. He got up and sauntered to the other side of the office and leaned against a rack of metal charts. "And follow those procedures the doctor did."

"The doctor?" replied Wakeman. "I haven't even seen a doctor. I want to see one right now. Someone in authority."

"Yes, you have seen the doctor, too," said another orderly. "You talked to him right after you came in."

"What?" said Wakeman. "I don't remember talking to any doctor!"

The first orderly turned and looked at him out of big sardonic eyes. "Really? I wonder if that might, just *might*, have something to do with why you're here."

In a waiting room on the other side of the station a man was sitting in the company of an elderly lady. As Wakeman watched, the man got up, walked into the center of the room, unzipped his pants, and urinated on the floor.

Wakeman was aghast. He pointed. "That . . . that man! Look, he's taking a piss right on the floor!"

"Go sit down until the doctor has time to see you

again," said the nurse. She walked over to a cabinet, rummaged around for a few moments, and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. "Here's your cigarettes." She handed the pack to Wakeman.

"I don't smoke," he said. "Except at parties. I just got them for the ball. You can have them."

"Take them anyway," said the nurse. "Believe me, you'll need them." She closed the window in Wakeman's face.

Wakeman was left staring into the station, his fingers gripping the window ledge. A clock on the wall said fifteen minutes after three. How could he have slept that long? And he didn't even feel rested, just strangely sedated. He rubbed the sore spot on his hip. Had he been given an injection?

He shook his head and moved away from the window and into what appeared a large living room. He looked down and saw the pack of cigarettes in his hand. "What the hell," he said. He hadn't smoked--outside of parties--for years, but the nurse was right: he sure needed one now.

No sooner had he lit the cigarette than he was surrounded by several clamoring, unwashed bodies. In seconds the cigarettes were gone and one man was asking for the butt of the one Wakeman was smoking. Wakeman gave him the cigarette, barely smoked, and flung the empty pack to the

floor in disgust. He began to pace about. Across the room, a woman Wakeman took to be a therapist (engaged as she was in some kind of table activity with some patients) frowned at him. But in an instant she replaced the frown with a condescending smile and mouthed the words, "Come here." Wakeman responded by sitting down in a resentful haze next to a radiator that hissed and popped in a crisp counterpoint to his mood. The late afternoon sun infiltrated the room through dirty windows and heavy metal screens, and irritated Wakeman by reflecting off a steel water fountain into his eyes. Angrily, he began trying to make sense of his predicament. He had been drawn into the mental ward like a bee buzzing curiously around one of the those carnivorous plants. All of a sudden, snap!--and he was in. How long before he could resolve the mix-up and get out of the institution? He might have to call a lawyer.

Eventually, these concerns became displaced by the activity in the ward. The man who had urinated on the floor had been brought in from the visiting area. Now he was engaged in pacing in and out of the room. A long hall abutted the dayroom. The man would disappear down the hall only to reappear minutes later. Each time he appeared, he followed the same path: an intricate, invisible labyrinth. At the center of the labyrinth was a circle

which seemed to mark the end of a cycle of the man's wanderings. The man followed the circle for one revolution. Then he performed a military-like about face and retraced his steps back through the dayroom and down the hall. Wakeman sat in horrified absorption. The man's labyrinthine wanderings seemed to intrude into his mind, to possess and numb it. He began to have difficulty following a rational train of thought.

At length, his peripheral vision made him aware that he was being stared at. He tore his attention from the labyrinth-walker and looked into the deep-socketed, terrified eyes of a young man. A book lay open on the man's lap. Wakeman jerked his gaze away and tried to ignore the young man, pretending to be preoccupied with what he supposed to be a therapy group assembling on the other side of the room. But Wakeman could feel the gaze fastened firmly on him. He would have stared the man down in most other places, but here he had no desire to make any enemies, or for that matter, any friends. Just ignore him, Wakeman told himself. But he found this impossible: there was something disturbing about the man's wide-eyed fascination with him. Something out of keeping even with the extraordinary situation in which he found himself. Wakeman could stand it no longer.

He got up and walked over toward the therapy group,

watching it without interest or comprehension. Suddenly, music began to play. It came from a record-player sitting on a table amidst a pile of empty coffee-cups and cigarette butts. The music was a polka. To its accompaniment, the therapy group began to dance around in a circle. The circle spun faster and faster, and soon began to take on the appearance of a mad sort of *hora*. Appalled, Wakeman started to turn away, but suddenly a fat woman with a knot on her forehead grabbed his arm and dragged him into the circle. Wakeman found himself being propelled along by a score of dancers, dancing in wild gyrations. His other arm had been grabbed by a toothless old man with a thick gray stubble on his face. The old man was surprisingly strong: his grip was painful. After a few moments of this the music stopped. The circle came to a halt.

The therapist was issuing instructions that Wakeman ignored as he tried to release himself from the claws gripping both his arms. And then another activity began. A young, stout man stepped from the circle's perimeter into its center. He announced, "My name is *Johhhnn*," then bowed and backed his way back into the circle. One by one, other patients stepped into the ring and performed similar pantomimes. Wakeman was paralyzed by revulsion. The whole scene was absurd to the extent that it seemed somehow bigger than itself, to have symbolic meaning.

Then Wakeman felt the grip on his arms loosen. But before he could swing away from the circle, he was seized again. He then found himself looking into the huge dark brown eyes of the man with the book. His expression was one of pleading. He stepped close and whispered into Wakeman's ear, "You have to get out of the circle. You have to get out!"

"I couldn't agree more," Wakeman replied. The man released his grip. Wakeman wandered in distraction away from the therapy circle, rubbing his wrists.

"Daniel, leave that man alone," said the therapist.

Daniel again took Wakeman's arm and said in a low voice, "Arthur Inman. I know."

Then he turned and strode back over to his chair at the edge of the room. He picked his book up off the chair and walked back in Wakeman's direction. "Here," he said. "Read it. It's all in here." Wakeman got a glimpse of the title as the book was handed to him. *The Circular Gardens*, in bold print, lettered the cover.

Wakeman reached for the book. But before he could take it, it was intercepted. Another man, much older, twisted it away from Daniel, who stepped back and turned to Wakeman helplessly. "It's all in there, he said" he said.

"Who said?" Wakeman said.

The man who had grabbed the book smiled at Wakeman. "That's just the way he talks. It happens when he gets upset." Then he turned to the young man and said, "go away, Daniel."

By this time Wakeman's senses were strained past their capacity. He stared at the old man, who was dressed in what appeared to be an old-fashioned black riding outfit, complete with bow-tie and hat. All he needed was a whip. And he had an outlandish handlebar mustache, waxed and turned to perfection at both ends.

Daniel looked at the old man with fear in his eyes. "He's two-thousand years old and knew Emperor Perpetua, he said," he said.

"And Saint Reno and the Emperor Timeria," said the man to Wakeman. "And much later, Libidio, Cardinal Wilbur, Diphravia---not to drop names, of course. In the thirteenth century, I accompanied Marco Soccoro to Fatua, where for a time I served in the court of the Crustacean emperor and studied the Way Out. A long life. Many experiences. At your service. One of my many names is McX. Adrian McX."

Wakeman was speechless. After a moment of silence, the polka started up again, the record player's volume turned to maximum. Wakeman jumped, stared at the circle--which had begun again its insane gyrations--and

turned back to McX.

The man smiled again. He made a gesture as if to deplore the noise, and shouted over it, "The Dionysian spirit, *n'est ce pas?* Where's the wine?"

Then something crashed into him. Under cover of the noise and activity, Daniel had picked up a chair and brought it down on McX's back. Had he not just begun to move away from Wakeman, it would have hit the old man's head. McX reeled toward the nurses' station, apparently stunned. Daniel ran with him and began trying to trying to wrest the book from McX's grasp. The young man jerked the book back and over his head, but the tall old man held on. McX and Daniel were shouting at each other. The dance had broken up and the other patients and the therapist crowded back against the wall. The polka continued full blast. "Somebody turn that goddamn music off," yelled someone.

Wakeman stepped backwards a few feet to get away from the fight, finding himself at the door of the nurses' station. He looked inside for the insolent orderlies. Yet no one was to be seen but the nurse. Perhaps the orderlies had been called off on other disciplinary duties, Wakeman thought. Then the P.A. came on and a voice announced "Code Blue to Unit One, Code Blue to Unit One." Daniel and McX were by now struggling on the floor. The

young man had wrestled the book away, and was trying to get up and away from the old man. McX, however, held on gamely, throwing ineffective punches at the same time. Daniel got nearly to his feet, but McX's hand darted out and grabbed his ankle and tripped him. The two rolled down the short hall almost to Wakeman's feet. He backed closer to the nurses' station door.

Then, the door having yielded to his weight, he was standing in the nurses' station. The nurse had been looking out the window at the action; she turned around. "You are not supposed to be in here," she said. She advanced a step or two in Wakeman's direction, frowning.

He saw his opportunity. He walked over the the cabinet from which the nurse had taken his cigarettes. "I won't be here for long. I'll just take my things, and not trouble you further." Quickly, he located his clothes and started out of the nurses' station into the visiting area.

Just outside the door he found his way blocked by an old man. "Just a minute," said the old man.

"Excuse me," replied Wakeman, pushing the man aside. "I was just on my way out." As he passed the man, he saw several other old men coming out of an office abutting the visiting room. Most of them had long, flowing gray beards.

"Where are the orderlies?" said one of them, his

voice cracking and wobbling.

Another said, "At a disturbance on ward two. It's up to us."

With this Wakeman felt a tug on his pajama top: the old man he'd passed at the door had latched onto him. Wakeman tried to turn and swat the old man away. But with every turn the old man held on: no matter how fast he whirled, he could not shake him. Wakeman could hear the man's shoes tapping frantically as he tried to keep up with his captive.

The other old men were trying to help. They stood in a circle around Wakeman and their colleague, trying unsuccessfully to grab Wakeman's arms as he whirled. Then one of them hitched onto the first old man's belt, then another onto his, and soon Wakeman was trying to loose himself from a line of old men that trailed and turned behind him as if engaged in some ghastly variation on a latine dance.

"Damn it!" said Wakeman. "Do you realize that I am a University professor and the author of several books?"

Wakeman, exhausted, found himself unable to turn anymore. He changed tactics. Stopping a moment to lure the old men into a false sense of victory, he gave a mighty tug against the hands on his belt and felt himself suddenly free. He began to run. But then his feet slipped out from under him and he found himself sitting on

his rear in a pool of warm liquid.

"Eggghhh," he said. "Goddamn it, you made me land in that man's urine! Is it not enough to keep me in this abominable place against my will? Must you rub me in other people's excretions?"

At this point the door of the waiting room opened and several orderlies ran in. They halted at the sight before them: Wakeman and the old men wallowing on the floor in a pool of liquid. Then some of the ran into the dayroom. Wakeman saw them, out of the corner of his eye, separating Daniel and McX.

When the laughter had subsided, one of the orderlies that had remained said, "Doctor, I guess you want this man secluded."

The little man who had fastened himself to Wakeman's belt nodded. "Yes, I certainly do." Then he turned to the nurse, who was holding onto the window sill and shaking with mirth. "And prepare an injection of you know what!!"

Then Wakeman found his arms grasped by two large orderlies and he was escorted through the nurses' station and into the room in which he had awakened earlier. The man on the bed looked up at him. His one eye peered up at Wakeman. "Hey," he growled.

"How you feeling, Hoyt?" said one of the orderlies.

"Fuck off," croaked the man. "Hey hey hey."

The orderlies escorted Wakeman down a hall to the rear of the beds and stopped before a door. The door was unlocked and Wakeman was urged into the room and forced to lay face down on a mat on the floor. An orderly pulled down his pajamas and he heard the nurse say behind him, "Relax now. There will be a little stick." With that he felt a jab in his posterior.

"Oh! Ouch! What are you trying to poke me with, a crossbeam?"

"Go to sleep now," said a voice. "You'll feel better when you wake up." The door slammed and Wakeman heard a lock turn.

He turned over and surveyed his cell. It was without features, save for a window in one wall and a door in the other. Wakeman struggled to his feet and walked to the window. It was covered by a metal screen. By standing on his tiptoes, he could see through the screen into the city below. The plaza was visible in one direction; the glass roof of the Crystal Palace glinted in the other. It was almost panoramic. "I'll bet this is the best seclusion room in the country for views," muttered Wakeman. "They ought to publish a pamphlet and advertise it."

With this Wakeman lay down on the mat. He could feel the substance the nurse had injected into his veins work-

ing already. The seclusion room began to swirl around him, and he began to feel drowsy. Just before closing his eyes he glanced up at the window in the door. Looking in was the bearded face of one of the doctors. His eyes grew large as Wakeman stared back.

A key in the lock. The lock turning.

Wakeman sat up on the mat. He decided, as the door opened, that he would have to be firm with the staff, to demand a lawyer immediately.

A lone figure strode into the room. McX. He was walking as if to avoid being heard and he held a finger to his lips. He carried a bundle of clothes, the costume beard laying on top.

"You!" said Wakeman. "How did you get in here?"

"Ssshhh." Held up a key. Motioned Wakeman to arise.

"Since when do mental wards give their patients keys?" said Wakeman as he tried to get up.

"I really must insist that you be quite. Here, put these on. I'm not a patient, I'm a doctor. And put on that beard as well."

Wakeman began to take off the pajamas. "A doctor!" he said.

"Yes, a doctor. Why is that so hard to believe? Hurry."

"Why? What's going on."

"I'm taking you out of here, that's what's going on."

"How? Am I discharged?"

"Well, no. Not exactly. It's to be an old fashioned escape. Are you up to it?"

Wakeman's hesitation lasted for only seconds. "I think so. Let me put on this beard. . . ."

"Hurry." McX moved to the door and looked down the hall. "All right. Follow me."

Wakeman followed the old man down the hall and into the nurses' station. The same large nurse was in charge, alone in the station.

"Doctor, I'm recommending a simulacrum exposition for that new patient," McX said to Wakeman. "What do you think?"

The nurse was staring.

"I would highly recommend such a test," sputtered Wakeman. He followed McX out of the station, through the visiting area and then into the hallway outside the ward.

"I don't think our ruse worked too well," said McX. It will take that nurse, stupid as she is, about three minutes to solidify her suspicions enough to go back and check your seclusion room. Then one more minute until she calls a code for escape. Hurry!"

The two hurried down the hallway until they came to

an intersection. "This way," said McX, and the two men turned right. "I'm trying to take you the back way so as to avoid traffic, but we still will probably run into someone."

The Public Address came on. "Code Blue to Unit One," it said.

"Too soon," said McX. She was more intelligent than I anticipated."

McX and Wakeman picked up speed and in seconds entered a stairwell. The door shut behind them. McX stopped, out of breath, and opened the door a crack and looked through. Wakeman could hear the thunder of running feet far down the hall, becoming louder as the feet came closer. Then the noise dissipated.

"Good," said McX. "They continued on to Unit One. But it won't take them long to consult the nurse and come after us." McX was still speaking as he started down the stairs.

"Wait," said Wakeman. "I think I'm going to be sick." Suddenly he had been struck by dizziness. Things were starting to whirl.

The P.A. had continued to sound announcements, though at first Wakeman could not quite make out what they were. Then he heard the phrase "Dr. Walker code one."

"That's code for escape in progress," said McX.

"Every orderly in this part of the building will be out looking for us. You must continue, sick or not."

Wakeman got up and stumbled down the stairs after McX. Now he was seeing things: McX had split into identical twins which ran side-by-side down the steps. Spots swirled around him. The messages from the P.A. had degenerated into meaningless phrases. "Naturally, it is a question of time," and "Of course, a brunette," it remarked in a low-pitched, husky female voice. Wakeman heard a door open in the stairwell above and then the sound of many feet.

Then they ceased their descent and McX led the way out of the stairwell into another hallway. Just outside the stairwell door was another door. And this one--glass--opened to a parking lot. It was dark outside.

"We've almost made it," said McX. Even if they follow us here, they won't have a key. They'll have to call security to unlock it."

The P.A. moaned and sighed. It was as if the building itself was alive and uncoiling itself into a lascivious stretch. Over this Wakeman heard footsteps pounding down the stairs.

"Now," said McX. The door was open and the old man was starting out it.

Wakeman heard the doorknob on the stairwell door

turning and just as he ran into the parking lot several orderlies burst into the hallway.

McX hurled the door shut and turned the key. The crowd of orderlies inside stood looking through the glass windows. Then they wheeled and raced out of sight.

"Hurry, hurry," said McX, bustling up to Wakeman. "They'll merely run to the nearest exit. And that's not far." He grabbed Wakeman's arm and led him to an automobile. The car had been backed into its parking space.

"Quick. Get in and slide over," said McX. Then he followed Wakeman into the vehicle and started the engine and put the transmission in gear and hit the accelerator.

The car screamed out of its parking place and careened down the lane away from the hospital. Wakeman looked behind as several orderlies ran out from between some cars and stood watching the car speed away.

"Made it," said McX. He steered the car out of the parking lot and into a busy street. "Wasn't that exciting?"

Wakeman, panting, could say nothing for several moments. Then he turned. "Why did you help me?"

McX's bushy eyebrows raised but he kept his gaze firmly on the traffic. He was weaving in and out of traffic, driving at high speed. Then he turned down a side street, then another, and slowed.

"That ought to throw any security cars that might be after us," he said. "To answer your question, I haven't lived for over two thousand years without acquiring some appreciation for the symmetry of things."

"What do you mean?" pressed Wakeman.

"It was necessary."

Wakeman looked closely at the old man for several seconds, then sighed and sank into the seat. He had escaped a locked mental ward, which he did not remember entering, with the assistance of an old man who claimed, simultaneously, to be a doctor and two milleniums old. How could he be expected to make sense of that, especially after having wakened the night before in a transit terminal and discovering that one could not remember how he got there? It was too much to take in at one time. He would have to think it out in isolation. There had to be a rational explanation for it all.

Besides, the hallucinations were growing increasingly real. Indescribable forms flashed in and out of sight in front of his eyes. An open wound in the sky bled crimson onto the roofs and towers of the city. And he could hear singing that sounded as if it emanated from a choir in a vast cathedral.

"Oh, God," said Wakeman. "I don't know if I should have escaped or not. Maybe I needed to be there. The

hallucinations. . . ."

"It's probably the medicine," said McX. "A side effect of the very medicine they administer to combat mental illness is hallucinations. On the other hand you could indeed be insane." The doctor shifted about uncomfortably, his attention rapt on the surrounding traffic. Wakeman noted the top of a book, just visible, sticking out from McX's inside coat pocket.

"Is that the book you and Daniel were fighting over?" said Wakeman.

"What? This?" replied McX. He smoothed down his coat and began trying to button it with one hand. "As a matter of fact it is."

"Why was it so necessary to keep it from the young man?" said Wakeman.

"It was closely associated with his delusions."

"Let me see it."

"Not hardly. At this point it might complicate the situation immeasurably."

"What do you mean? How could it? I wrote it, you know."

Spinoza turned onto a wide boulevard. The glass roof of the Crystal Palace shone in the distance. Traffic was thick. He looked over. "Ha! No, it was written by Paul Fourier. Your claim of authorship makes me even more

resolute to keep the book from you. I don't want another Daniel on my hands."

"But . . . how could a book make things worse?" protested Wakeman.

But McX did not answer immediately. He kept glancing in the rear view mirror.

Wakeman let it go, his mind turning to the recent escape. "That line of old men who grabbed me," he said, "and the struggle that followed. It was so ghastly . . . that it seemed to mean something. It seemed like a portent."

"A portent perhaps," said McX, slowing the car and looking, apparently, for something to the side of the road. "More appropriately, it was a symbol. You're young and the doctors are old. It was a symbol of the struggle of the young to escape the bounds of the old."

Was he being facetious? "That's a bit far fetched, don't you think?" said Wakeman. "Such symbolisms exist only in art."

"And what is the difference?" said McX, his old eyes flashing for an instant at Wakeman. "To those who say that both art and life are only the instant at hand, that one cannot step back and view the whole and its intricate construction, I say balderdash! One has only to look closely to see the parallelisms, the forms and structures

of art in life! And you know, all that structure goes nowhere, applies to nothing outside of life, just as it should in the best art!"

Then the doctor hit the brakes and suddenly shot the auto into a parking lot near the Crystal Palace.

"What. . . where are we going," said Wakeman. "My apartment is several more blocks."

"We can't risk it any further," said McX. "Just now in the rear-view mirror I saw three police cars in succession speeding through that intersection behind us. They're patrolling the area. Sometime while your clothes were in confiscation, the doctors probably got your address from the identification in your wallet. They know where you live. You can't go home."

"Oh, no," said Wakeman. "Where will I go? How long could I keep from going home?"

The doctor had shot the car into an empty space. "Come on," he said.

"Where?" said Wakeman. "Take me to a friend's. I'll tell you the address, it's. . . ."

"We can't risk it," said McX. "The orderlies no doubt got our license number and noted the car's description. It's just a matter of time before the police find us out."

"But why the Crystal Palace?--"

"Because that's where we are. Moreover, you will be much less conspicuous in a crowd. Let's go."

With considerable reluctance, Wakeman opened his door and got out of the car. The wind howled across the parking lot and buffeted the two as they hurried across the parking lot into a narrow alley which led to an isolated corner of the Palace. There they found a door and entered the chamber.

The Palace was alive with activity. Multitudes were rushing about. People in costume hung like ants from suspended walkways and crowded the conveyor belt onto which McX led an exhausted Wakeman. The belt took them into the very heart of the terminal, where the crowds were the thickest, where trains roared in, and where tracks converged in a bewildering thicket. McX led Wakeman into a large snackbar, and urged him into a chair at an empty table at its rear.

"How long will I have to stay here?" said Wakeman.

"Where will I go next?"

There was no answer. Wakeman looked up at McX. But the doctor was no longer there. He had disappeared into thin air.

"Why did he have to leave me now, here?" thought Wakeman. What would he do? The hallucinations had melded the crowds into a universal smear of noise and activity.

Vending machines sat hissing at him and looked about to melt. He looked away from the crowds, down at the table in front of him. A newspaper lay on the table. At the top a headline announced *FESTIVAL BEGINS*. Sunday's paper. Even though it was Monday.

CHAPTER FOUR

Explosions. Sirens.

Wakeman sat up in bed, then got up and stumbled to the window and opened the drapes. Far away, just visible to the side the Crystal Palace's glass roof, a column of smoke was rising. Near the smoke a helicopter hovered. As he watched, something seemed to drop from the helicopter and then came an explosion and a large cloud of black smoke spewed from the roof of the house. The action seemed to be taking place in the St. Superflua district: the massive hospital hulked nearby.

Wakeman closed the drapes and turned his attention to more pressing concerns. The first among those concerns was the fact that he had once again awakened in a place which, even though it was his flat, he could not remember coming to. In fact, he could remember nothing past the disappearance of McX in the terminal.

The whole episode of finding himself in the mental ward, the outrageous events there, and finally, the escape, seemed fuzzy on the edges, like a dream. Had he--in reality--come directly home from the ball? Had he arrived in the Crystal Palace without incident and stumbled up the hill to his apartment, intoxicated on both alcohol and Gabriel's incredible hashish, and then dreamed both the

hospital sequence and the outlandish McX? Wakeman looked at his watch. It was now Tuesday. If indeed he had dreamed the mental ward, and come straight home from the Ball Sunday night, it would now be only Monday. Ruling out the possibility, that is, of sleeping the whole day through.

At this point Wakeman did not really care. What possessed him this morning was an epic hangover. It was a hangover worse than any he had had before: it must have come from the drugs injected into him in the Mental Ward. He stumbled over the costume he'd worn through the escape and that he'd thrown on the floor the previous night, and reeled into the kitchen and gulped down a hand full of aspirins. Then he returned to the living room and lay down on the couch. The headache must go away, he told himself. Today at three he was to meet Gabriel. It was already eleven. If he wanted to work with the director he would have to learn something about the novel, *The Circular Gardens*, that the director intended to adapt to film.

Wakeman's head swam even more furiously as he thought of the novel. What kind of farce was blowing up around him now, anyway? One *begins* what *may* have been a novel and then the novel shows up written and published by an author bearing the name of its chief character? Bearing a name which also had been used by himself--Wakeman--as a

pen name? Suddenly it seemed virtually certain to Wakeman that his whole connection with the novel was a massive coincidence. More than likely, he'd been mistaken even about using the pen name Fourier. Maybe it had been Fournier or something like that. After all, he hadn't used the sobriquet in several years. . . .

He struggled upright and looked across the room at the bookcase he knew contained the collection of short stories he had written under the name Fourier, or Fournier, whatever it was. He limped to the bookcase, and after a short search, pulled out a volume titled *The Exile and Other Stories*. Damn! There was one solution to the mystery down the drain: the author's name on the cover left no doubt that his pen name had been, at least while writing the stories in the book, *Paul Fourier*.

Wakeman reeled back across the room and collapsed again on the couch.

And what about the title, *The Circular Gardens*? The equivalence of his pen name with that of an actual Fourier could--perhaps--be believed. There had to be other Paul Fouriers in the world, and it was not impossible that one of them could be an author. But then, there was the coincidence of the title, one appearing both on his computer screen, above a text which he seemed himself to have written, and (presumably) on the cover of Fourier's book.

That could be explained away too: perhaps he had copied, into his word processor, for whatever reason, a section of Fourier's novel. Fine. But then, back to the name. One coincidence was believable. But two? The process was circular, each coincidence excluding the other from resolution. But then, perhaps he copied the fragment simply because he had heard of an author with the same name as his fictional persona--Paul Fourier, and found the book. Yes, that was it. That was plausible.

But then there was the matter of smaller, but no less maddening and unresolvable coincidences. The first was that he could not remember anything about the novel, other than his own vague impressions of having begun it. The second was that he was on the verge of getting involved, out of the blue, with Gabriel in a project having to do with the novel that had provided the coincidence in the first place. The third was that he had encountered the book yet again in the mental ward, where it had assumed an importance seemingly out of keeping with its mere existence as a book. Coincidences? They seemed to be more part of an overall design, vague though it may have been, to link him with the book.

Then he realized the idiocy of what he had been trying to do. In the face of growing evidence that his imaginary world had substance in the real one, he had been

trying to reason away the impossible. One began each day with the assumption that the world in which one lived was real, that the natural laws that one's existence had evolved around were still in effect. Yet evidence pointed to the existence of a novel never written, authored by a man who never existed. His attempt to rule out one or more of the coincidences was the action of a normal, rational man, who assumed that everything had a logical explanation. And had not the whole force of his existence belied this supposition? Was his life not surfeited by the absurdest of simultaneities, absurd simply because they had no explanation? So why should he be so eager to solve the mystery of Fourier and the novel? Why not live with the contradiction and mystery a while, and savor it? Unlike most of his coincidences, this one had the aura of adventure, the spice of alternate worlds and identities. And it was, after all, Festival time in the city! No need to worry about his blackouts in the Crystal Palace! The mystery would no doubt dissipate as time passed. There would be a simple explanation that would make his puzzlings over it look silly. That explanation might appear even today, as he intended to research the book in the library. Until then, why rush it? Mystery! Don't try to solve it! Revel in it!

With such reassurances Wakeman rose to ready himself

for his meeting with Gabriel that afternoon. First he phoned the university and cancelled both his classes. Then he stood for a minute looking at his computer, considering searching his files for more references to *The Circular Gardens*. But he was running late.

His logical first step was to search the libraries. (He had no time today to investigate the plethora of bookstores.) True, the director had conducted his own search for the book, but there was no telling how thorough that search had been. Given the book's importance to his project, the director had probably already looked in the libraries; but perhaps he hadn't.

An hour later, later, Wakeman was seated in front of a terminal connected to the public library's on-line catalogue. If the book was not to be found here, in the labyrinthine stacks of the ancient stone edifice that reared up over the Old City like a small mountain, it would be nowhere. Except perhaps the Library of Parliament in Westonia, or in the publisher's stock rooms. Wakeman issued a command to the computer and typed in *Fourier, Paul*, his fingers flying over the terminal's keyboard. In seconds, the screen flashed the author's name. Eureka! Proof that the man existed! But . . . what was this? Two books were listed under the name: the

first was *The Circular Gardens*, the second *The Exile and Other Stories*. How puzzling. Wakeman would have preferred that there had been two Paul Fouriers listed in the computer, one the author of *The Circular Gardens*, the other plainly his own *nom de plume*, author of *The Exile*. That way a part of the mystery would be solved: there were two Paul Fourier's in the world, and he--Wakeman--was not author of *The Circular Gardens*. The way it stood, mystery reared over him almost as overwhelmingly as it had this morning at his apartment: that is, evidence pointed to the fact that he had indeed completed and published a book which he could only remember beginning, and that so vaguely that it was a bare impression that might have had its source anywhere. But he was sitting here idly, staring off into space, when he had much more to do. . . .

Before turning to the information on the books themselves, Wakeman looked a minute at the information accompanying the name. Just first and last names, and no birth date given. This was unusual, but if there was a Fourier he probably just wanted to remain as anonymous and inaccessible as possible. Wakeman himself refused to supply a birth date to bibliographers. Why should one be defined by a date? But this similarity pointed even further to him being the Fourier listed. . . .

Hurriedly, Wakeman began switching between the var-

ious options on the screen. Then he typed in the command that yielded a synopsis of *The Circular Gardens'* plot:

A man wakes up one day to find the gaze of a dark and enigmantical force directed on him, and goes off in search of the central meaning of his existence.

It was practically verbatim of what Gabriel had told him the previous evening.

Then Wakeman noted that the novel was listed as not checked out. He decided there was no point in calling up *The Exile*. He knew enough about that already. He inscribed the call number into his brain, turned and almost ran to the elevators. With his luck, someone was upstairs, at that very moment, about to pull the *The Circular Gardens* out of the shelf. He would fight this person, bribe him out of the book. . . . The elevator arrived and Wakeman got on. The doors closed behind him.

A few minutes later, the doors opened again and a disgusted Wakeman was once again wandering the library's entrance area. In spite of the computer's claim that *The Circular Gardens* was not On Loan, Wakeman had not been able to locate it. Where it was supposed to have been was an empty spot.

Wakeman spied a librarian.

"We have many ghost books," she said. "In spite of our detection system, someone may have stolen it, or it could be anywhere in the stacks, or under a shelf, just anywhere."

Wakeman walked in despair to the front door of the library, looking at a clock on the way. Two thirty. Time to go and meet Gabriel.

Wakeman was as disgusted as he was confused. He'd hoped to clear up this whole mystery, read the book--or most of it--before three in the afternoon, and impress Gabriel with his critical acumen. Then he'd overslept, and then failed to find a copy of the novel. He would probably have to refuse the director's offer of collaboration, if indeed it was made.

A man sitting on the opposite side of the transit car opened a newspaper, and a bold black headline screamed *EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE IN MILLIONS*. What was that headline underneath? . . . *SIX DEAD IN ST. SUPERFLUA CLASH*. The article underneath, Wakeman surmised, explained the explosion and fire he had noted from his window that morning.

When at the next stop the man got up to leave the car, Wakeman asked for and received the paper. First he read about the earthquake. There was nothing of signifi-

cance in it beyond a citing of damage to various parts of the city. Then he read in amazement the article under the second headline.

A shoot-out in the St. Superflua district between Metropolitan police and a shadowy political group late this morning has left six dead, three wounded, and four in police custody. Details of the battle are still sketchy. One of those killed was a city policeman.

According to police spokesman Carlos Maidrot, a police special tactics squad surrounded the house at 622 Altieri at about ten thirty this morning. This action was taken in response to information indicating the house was the headquarters of the so-called Golden Path group. The group, which is linked ideologically to the Saints of the Last Days cult, advocates the violent overthrow of the government and is believed chiefly responsible for the civil unrest in Westonia.

Having surrounded the house, the police met with armed resistance. Reinforcements were called in, along with one of the department's helicopters. A so-called civil defense house

bomb was dropped on the house at 10:55 A. M.

Police then stormed the building, meeting no further resistance.

According to Ford, among those killed was Bonneville physician Dr. Herbert Hoffman.

Ford said that police had received evidence recently indicating Hoffman, 78, was of the highest echelon of The Golden Path's command structure.

According to highly placed sources, the group has been known to be active in Bonneville for the past three weeks. The location of the group's headquarters, however, had not been known until a source professionally linked to Hoffman became suspicious about activities in the St. Superflua hospital ward Hoffman supervises. (Hoffman is head of the St. Superflua Psychiatric Unit). Police then followed Hoffman to the group's headquarters.

The others killed were identified as: Robert King DeVoto, 32; Patricia Ramirez Dipple, 26; Albert Swanson Steele, 47; and Jean Bernard Cellini, 59. Wounded and under police guard at St. Mary's are Charles Landom Couchwealth, 22; Thornton Fatima, 77; and Lorraine Wilson

Lamartine, 42. Also arrested were Joyce Lambert Siegel, 51; Dennis Eugene Ollier, 46; Quinn Jeremy Tullpocket, 39, and Stephan Medvedev, 27. The name of the policeman killed was withheld pending notification of relatives.

Herbert *Hoffman*. And then, Thornton *Fatima*. Wakeman dropped the paper on seat next to him and sat for a while in a sort of stupor. Hoffman and Fatima, names of two of the doctors in the novel fragment. But no, the name had been Fatimata. Moreover, Fatima in the police report had not been identified as a doctor. Fatimata in the novel had.

Yet these last thoughts were grasping at straws, Wakeman realized. Was there any real doubt, considering Hoffman's position on the mental ward, and the coincidence of the unusual names Fatima and Fatimata, that at least two of the novel's characters were modeled after people in real life?

What was this novel, *The Circular Gardens*, anyway? Was it really a novel, or a mimetic account of a real man's experiences, one of those experiences occurring in a mental ward? Had the fragment on his computer indeed been a part of the novel?

And what had it been doing on his computer screen? He did not know anything about fringe political groups. He did not even know the political objectives of the Golden Path. Had the fragment, or part of it, leaked somehow into his computer, perhaps via the CompuLink network that nearly all computers in the city were hooked up to? Perhaps so: considering his ignorance both of the novel and its seeming political context, it was impossible that he could himself have written it. Yes, that had to be it.

That had to be it, that is, if he hadn't written under the pen name Paul Fourier, and if Paul Fourier hadn't been the "author" of the fragment, and if only one Fourier had not been listed in the library's catalogue, the author of both *The Circular Gardens* and *The Exile*. Damn it! It was too labyrinthine for him to figure out. He had to get a copy of the book. Had to.

The devastation was almost frightening, thought Wakeman.

He and Roberta, who had preceeded Wakeman to the rendezvous designated the previous evening by Gabriel, stood at the corner of Stromberg and Rosetti, looking up into the ruined neighborhoods on the steep slope of Mount Immanuel. The more gradual slope of the mountain spread

outward, downward, back the way they'd come; in that direction, framed by the stone buildings on both sides of Stromberg, a large portion of Bonneville could be seen, a disordered mosaic of roofs, streets, parks, and office buildings sweeping downward into the valley, spreading outwards over the river and ending on both horizons in the few scattered suburbs that inched up the mountains on all sides of the city. The steeper part of Mount Immanuel began its ascent just past the intersection; Wakeman's and Roberta's vision followed the straight line of Stromberg to the point where the grade became too steep and the street veered off, the hill here tilting upward at a sharper and sharper angle until, two hundred feet from the summit, it became entirely verticle. On both sides of the street were enormous piles of rubble. Prior to the earthquake, the rubble had been buildings.

"Are we early?" inquired Roberta. She had wrapped her arms around her, shivering in the unseasonable cold. "This place gives me the creeps."

"No, he's late," replied Wakeman, who had been to this spot before and found the scenes of devastation fascinating. He remembered the earthquake only months ago. He'd wakened in the early morning to find his bed skittering across his floor, his book cases falling, the sound of shattering glass. When the quake ended an eter-

nity later, he had looked out and saw big columns of smoke rising from the area of Mount Immanuel, and heard the scream of fire engines all across the city.

Now the area was as quiet as it got in the city. Not only had the steep areas of the hill been deserted, but many people had moved out of the lower area also. Because of this, and because of Stromberg being now a dead end street, there was no traffic. There were also no children playing in the streets, no pedestrians.

Roberta had spotted a figure loping down the hill in their direction. "Here he comes," she said.

Gabriel waved and yelled something unintelligible. Wakeman and Roberta started up the incline.

"Well," said Gabriel breathlessly. "How do you like my studio?"

"Devastating," replied Roberta.

The director laughed and bounded up the street as if there was no grade to speak of. Wakeman and Roberta had a hard time keeping up. Wakeman surveyed the scene around him. Destruction everywhere.

"How can you be expected to make a film in such conditions?" said Roberta.

The director sighed and slowed a bit. "A question I put to Wilde before I had seen the district. She told me that the contract stipulated the film being shot in the

old neighborhood, and that I was to consider it an essential element in the screenplay. Which suits me fine, now that I've had time to immerse myself in the area. You must admit that the old neighborhood has a mysterious ambience that might suit it for the right kind of film."

"One about the end of the world, maybe," muttered Roberta.

Wakeman felt both titillated and disquieted over hearing the novel referred to as a movie. The possibility of working with Gabriel had piqued the artist's curiosity in him; it would be fun to work on a film. And, though so concerned with privacy that he frequently wrote under a pen name, Wakeman was not above a certain amount of professional pride: he wanted his work to be known and discussed in the public forum. Moreover, he could use the money from film rights. Nevertheless, he'd have to disappoint Gabriel. . . .

"In the middle of all the destruction, there are a few areas left almost untouched," said Gabriel, walking backwards up the grade while speaking. "After the quake, the residents just left, lock, stock, and barrel, an exodus fueled by fear of aftershocks and new quakes. Geologists say that the quake was centered far from this mountain. If one centered under the mountain ever occurs, what you see would be nothing. One can imagine a whole

side of the hill disappearing into a chasm."

"You say there are untouched areas," said Wakeman. "I wonder if I could rent an apartment in any of them. A very well-built apartment, preferably. One built to current earthquake codes."

Gabriel looked dubious. "There are only a handful of residents remaining, and the city is trying to get them out. This is a very old area. Most of these houses were built long before there was such a thing as earthquake building codes."

At last the trio came to an intersecting street and turned into it. Here was an intact area such as Gabriel had mentioned. The trio walked by a succession of dwellings in good repair, then stopped in front of a modernistic three-story building that appeared built into the mountain behind it.

"Headquarters," said Gabriel.

Roberta, Wakeman, and Gabriel walked up a flight of stairs that led from the street to a side entrance under a porch. They entered the building, walked up another flight of stairs, and then they were in a large living room. Only a few pieces of furniture were in evidence.

Roberta and Wakeman sat down on a couch.

"Drink?" said Gabriel.

"No thanks," said Wakeman. "Haven't recovered from

last night." Carefully, he kept his gaze away from Rita. He would not sully his dignity by referring to a party which, no doubt, she had left with Wharton. "By the way, what was in that hash, anyway?"

"Nothing. Just hash. Why?"

"Oh, never mind. It just left me hallucinating, that's all."

"I told you it was good," laughed Gabriel. "We live in hallucinatory times, you know."

"I guess that's it," replied Wakeman. "The Festival can explain everything."

"The previous occupants of this house took everything they had," said Gabriel, as he rounded the bar and took a glass from a shelf. "They were lucky. Many people here lost everything. I've decided to move in here, temporarily, to get totally into the atmosphere. The city won't know the difference. They've already issued Wilde the permit to shoot the film, which includes the use of several buildings. I'm picking out the ones I want to use, hoping that will stimulate my creativity. Knowing about the novel, of course, would help in choosing. They also have to be certified as safe by the city. The studio will rent them from the owners, and furnish them."

Wakeman was put on edge by the director's optimism. He decided to get it over with. "Look, Gabriel, I hate to

disappoint you, but it doesn't seem that I can help you. I can't seem to locate the book. I've . . . read parts of it, but I remember little about it."

Gabriel looked crestfallen. He handed Roberta the glass of water and sat down on the other end of the sofa. "It was to be expected. It's almost like a conspiracy, to deny me the book. My assistant has scoured the public and university libraries for the novel, but with no success except to find another book by Fourier, *The Exile* or something like that. A book of short stories, written years ago and with no apparent relation to *The Circular Gardens*. But no novel, anywhere in the city as far as we can tell. It has to do with the trouble in Westonia. Apparently, the violence there has made shipment of Fourier's book impossible." Here the director stopped and called down the hallway. "Diana, could you come here a minute?"

Immediately a young woman walked into the room. Wakeman remembered her as the lead singer in the True Bohemians, the group that had played at the ball the previous evening. She was as solemnly beautiful today as she had been at the ball, as thin and dark. Her gaze merely flickered at Wakeman as she walked into the room. She was Gabriel's assistant?

"Have you been able to get through to Wilde?" said

Gabriel.

"No," replied the girl. "The phone company says much of the phone service is out."

"Where? Here?" said Roberta.

"No. In Westonia."

"But why? What's going on?" said Roberta.

"Riots. Martial law. The threat of a coup," replied Gabriel. "No one really knows what's going on. . . . But where are my manners? Have you met my assistant?"

"We saw her performing last night at Mrs. Great-house's," said Wakeman. "But we haven't been introduced."

"Well, meet Diana Eidle," said Gabriel. "Diana, come and join us. Mr. Wakeman and I were just about to discuss the film."

The girl rounded the couch and set down next to Gabriel. The director put his arm around her and whispered something in his ear.

Diana looked resentfully at the hand which hung near her small breast. "Give me a cigarette," she said tonelessly.

Wakeman had watched the girl as closely as he dared since her entrance. Her movements were so . . . economical that she hardly seemed to exert herself physically as she moved. With most people, you noticed the rather unattractive movements of feet, legs, and hips, as if

these parts were ill suited to the very mobility they provided, as if they acted only as the motive apparatus for the upper part of the frame rather than integral parts of the entire person. Compared with Diana's movements, other people waddled grotesquely. The girl was somehow whole, as if her every fibre was necessarily involved in the presentation of her person. The whole effect was almost ethereal.

The director was looking at him out of his dark face, a face sharp as an axe. Had he been speaking?

"Well, I didn't know whether you had looked," said Wakeman, "so I went to the library myself. The novel was missing. Tomorrow, I'll try the University. . . ."

The director took his arm from Diana's shoulders and leaned forward. His eyes flashed. "See what I mean about a conspiracy? Nor do the local bookstores stock the novel. They tell Diana, despite its seeming popularity, that it is out of print! The only information of any substance I've been able to unearth comes from the Library of Parliament Catalogue. This is that such a book was indeed published, this year. Thus, I have made much progress in the two weeks I've been involved with this project: I've proven the existence of the novel I'm to transform into a film!"

"I'm sorry, Bruno," said Wakeman. "I wish I could

help. If I find anything. . . ."

Gabriel seemed to brighten somewhat. "You said you remember only fragments of the novel. What do you remember? Anything would help, even if just to corroborate what my other source has told me."

"Other source?"

"Well, yes, but one hardly reliable. In fact, he is probably insane!"

"Probably driven that way from reading the book!" laughed Wakeman.

"All he told me was that the novel contains something about a political assassination."

"Well, interesting. But I don't see what it has to do with the part I remember. All I can remember is this Fourier, who seems to figure as a character in his own book, meditating on the city below, during Festival. And then there's another character, Arthur Inman, who enters a mental ward through a chamber with three other doors. Then he goes into the office and gets interviewed by a strange old doctor, Dr. Malick. The room is strange and dark, and several old men, doctors, are sitting in the back of the room. By the way, did anyone read the paper? A doctor named Herbert Hoffman was arrested in connection with that shoot-out in St. Superflua. He was a physician on the mental ward at St. Super's mental ward. What's

weird is that there is a character in the book named Hoffman--no first name given--who is a doctor on the St. Superflua mental ward."

"Interesting. . . ." muttered Gabriel. "Maybe Fourier knows him."

"But why wouldn't he change the name?" replied Wakeman.

The director didn't answer. He sat staring at Wakeman as if he didn't see him. "What on earth could that mean?" he mused. "I mean the part about the character coming through the doors and all. If one just knew the meaning of the work, one could understand, perhaps, this one part."

"I don't know the meaning," replied Wakeman. "There's some dialogue, but it's inconclusive, at least what I remember of it. Actually, I can supply you with what may be a printout of that scene."

"A printout? How so?"

"For some reason, it's in my computer. I'm not sure how it got there. I'm hooked up to the city's CompuLink, and you know how easily viruses are leaked. Not the full book, just a section of it. Actually, I don't even know it's the book, but it is titled, and it does mention Paul Fourier."

"Why, that's superb! At least it's a start."

"Well, it's not as much as you might hope for."

Roberta was looking at Wakeman with a crooked smile.

"So now I know where my date came from last night," she said.

"Bring it to me, will you. At least we can get a start, a feel for the thing. Something more will turn up."

"Who do you mean when you say 'we'?" said Roberta.

"I mean Thomas and myself," said the director, rising. "Come back tomorrow, Thomas. It may take some invention, but together, but I'll bet we'll get this script written. And we'll discuss the matter of salary."

CHAPTER FIVE

Why it was that he walked about the city during the small hours of the night Wakeman did not know. It had something to do with a pervasive discontent that had set in the last few years, a restlessness that interrupted his sleep and drove him out into the streets. It was the deserted old buildings jutting at odd angles out into the night, their darkened windows gazing impassively out over the city like those of great hollow beings, brick and concrete buddhas who saw points beyond and invisible to the humanity in the streets; it was the way broken glass caught the light of the streetlamps, cold, lucid, and mysterious; the dark truths lurking down the narrow, deserted alleys; the hard steets which seemed to spin an uninterpretable meaning out of their very labyrinthine wanderings. In the silence of the early morning, he felt somehow that he merged with the city.

After two hours of lying in bed, hoping for sleep to come, Wakeman got up and dressed. He was simply too tense from the day's developments to sleep. He wondered if he would be able to justify Gabriel's confidence in him. *Could* he contribute something of value to the film? And then there was the strange book, the enigma of Fourier, that he pushed to the back of his mind. He needed to get

out of the apartment and walk.

At about two A.M. Wakeman left the apartment and walked down the hill past the Crystal Palace and toward the river. He passed an area of student bars. A few young people were straggling about. He crossed the street to avoid them. The sound of music came from the open door of a bar. Several people came out of the bar as Wakeman passed. A young couple were arguing. Several cars passed by, splashing water from their wheels. After a while Wakeman had left the noise and people behind. He was deep in thought and hardly noticed where he was going. Soon he found himself walking across the Berkeley Avenue bridge into the Old City. The river below was hidden by the fog. Having crossed the river, it was only a short walk to the plaza.

Wakeman climbed the long flight of steps up from Berkeley to the vast old square. Here the fog hung in little white columns, like wraiths, above the stone pavement. A few lights shone in the windows of the old stone and brick buildings surrounding the square. Someone standing at one of the lit windows turned away as Wakeman looked up. The lamps around the perimeter of the plaza made immensely long dim reflections in the shallow pools of rainwater. The only sound was that of water dripping, dripping all around off the lamp posts, the buildings, the

stone railings of the square.

Wakeman was approaching the commemorative arch in a small park in the center of the square when he saw a man standing a short ways down an alley. The dark alley opened off the near side of the square. The man was urinating on a building. He zipped up his pants with a vigorous motion, seeming to pull himself up on his toes, and turned and walked in Wakeman's direction. His movement frightened a squirrel on the ground in the park. It scampered up a tree.

Wakeman was nearing the arch, walking in a direction that would lead him under it. He heard footsteps to his right; he looked over and saw that the man was walking on a trajectory that would eventually bring about a collision.

This was inconceivable. There was no one else on the square except the man and Wakeman, yet they apparently were destined to occupy the same pinpoint of space at the same pinpoint of time. The man remained on course toward the inevitable juncture, face downward in seeming oblivion. He appeared to be staggering a bit.

Already irritated at the developing coincidence, Wakeman's emotions boiled when he saw the man was Wharton.

The easiest thing would have been merely to change his course, turn his back and walk away from the coming

coincidence. But sometimes, just as he occasionally had the urge to lock himself out of his apartment, naked, simply because the possibility existed, Wakeman felt like throwing himself into a developing coincidence. During those times he had the urge to reach a state of total, uncompromising simultaneity. He wanted to wallow in it, to exult in it, to say, "If you want me, you have to take all of me." Such an attitude was Wakeman's only defense against the synchronic forces of the universe that sought--unconsciously, mind you: there can be no intent behind coincidence!--at every turn to exasperate him with their pointless confluences. There would be no in-between stuff for him. If he was to be tormented, it would to the highest possible degree. This is why he gritted his teeth and stepped determinedly along his course that night on the plaza.

Wharton and Wakeman had both mounted the steps to the arch. Wharton, who was stumbling in drunkenness, didn't even seem to know Wakeman was there until the last moment. And then the pair were upon each other. Wharton looked up and there was first the look of amazement, then of disgust, as he saw with Wakeman that the coincidence was to be first rate: the pair were going to collide, to collide in the center of the vast, empty square. But at the last minute Wakeman lost his courage, and maneuvered to miss

Wharton. It was this that caused him to lose control of the coincidence, that enabled simultaneity to inflict upon him the most infuriating of circumstances: Wakeman's maneuver was ineffective: as he moved to his right, Wharton moved to his left. Then, Wakeman's feet scuffing against the pavement in fury, he started in the opposite direction just as Wharton did the same.

"Goddamn it!" Wakeman shrieked. Wharton replied with his own screech of fury. He refused to yield and thus concede Wakeman's rightful place on the plaza. That Wharton did not acknowledge the precedence and superiority of Wakeman's hatred over his, that his fury at the coincidence did not pale beside Wakeman's, that he replied to the situation with exotic neuroses identical to and every bit as powerful as Wakeman's, enraged Wakeman to monstrous proportions.

Wakeman planted his feet, swung out and hit Wharton in the jaw.

The haymaker was more effective than Wakeman had anticipated. Wharton stumbled back and fell to the pavement.

"That'll teach you . . . to always be where I am," Wakeman shouted.

"Fuck you, you sick bastard," replied Wharton.

He was trying to get up. Wakeman circled around to

Wharton's rear and sent him sprawling with a kick in the ass. Wharton was propelled forward. He hit his head on a step.

Wakeman waited for Wharton to get up. He didn't. Wakeman checked to see if Wharton was still breathing. He was.

Wakeman was beginning to feel dizzy and nauseated. Perhaps it was the effort he had expended in the fight, combined with his recent excesses. He lurched across the square, heading for a canopied bench.

Then he caught sight of a sign down a street leading off the square. *Doc's* it said, blinking on and off.

A beer, thought Wakeman. What he needed was a beer. He stumbled down the street and into the bar.

"A beer," he said to the bartender, sitting down on a stool before the bar. He had not been in the tavern before, though he was aware of its reputation as a watering hole both for rowdy dockworkers and a few miserable deconstructionists. When Wakeman walked in, he saw several burly men in flannel shirts sitting around a table. A pitcher of beer sat on the table.

A lone figure occupied a stool several feet from Wakeman's own. He looked down at Wakeman and smiled. "It looks like you've been in a bit of a fracas," he said in a Francophone accent.

"Just a damned coincidence," replied Wakeman, smoothing his hair. He was too angry to talk to the man.

But the man rose and sauntered down the bar, still smiling. "What did you say?"

"I said a damned coincidence," replied Wakeman. He looked at the man uncertainly. Go away.

The man was young and handsome. His brown eyes radiated intelligence and good will. "Why, there's no such thing as coincidence," he said.

"Well, you've never met me, obviously," said Wakeman.

"By coincidence you no doubt imply the absurd," continued the stranger. "And there is no absurd in the mind of God. There is always a Cause behind everything."

A religious fanatic? "Ah, the old clockwork universe theory," said Wakeman. "God coordinates everything."

"Perhaps, but maybe not. God, of course, has not fallen from Being into time. Time exists only in our own world. God is outside of time. Look at it from His point of view, and you'll imagine a universe like a painting, in which everything is complete. There is no coordination to speak of, because there is no movement to coordinate. My name, by the way, is Arget. And I was speaking ironically, because, of course, you do not believe in a supreme Being, and neither do I." He held out his hand.

"Well, Monsieur Arget (the stranger had not said his

first name) you are right," replied Wakeman, now somewhat pleased with the encounter. Where but the Old City could he have a philosophical discussion in a worker's bar? "I do not believe in anything except Chance. And it is absurd. Thomas Wakeman."

"Yet there are other cosmologies besides the Divine which exclude the absurd," continued Arget. "Some theorists posit a universe in which time is finite, but godless. You will hear more about that in the next few days, believe me! The impression of a temporal sequence is an illusion, because all points exist simultaneously. Coincidence, then, is merely this fabric asserting itself to the perceptive viewer."

"You mean this 'perceptive viewer' can see through the fabric of time and view events that take place at other times?"

"One way to put it. Of course, it is difficult to speak of time *within* time."

"Well, it's nice to know that I'm perceptive, and can see what most others can't," said Wakeman. "But I'd do with a little less perceptiveness and a little more reason. And until this . . . circularity of time is proved, I'll cling to what appears to be real."

"As you wish," replied Arget. "But of course your way is madness. There are only different kinds and de-

grees of madness. To take any position, to reduce reality to concepts, is pure madness. Nevertheless, we must have these delusions to make our way through life. And of course it is human nature to stick with the madnesses we know best, which reinforce our preconceptions and make us seem more important on our tiny rock whirling through the blackness. These theories of alternate temporal structures, even the existence of a divine Author, are only other forms of madness, one that appeals to a new--and some might say dangerous--spirit and mode of thinking. But to reject the impression of linear time--well, for persons of more conventional views, that way lies an unfamiliar madness."

"Well, a little madness is welcome at times. The Festival is a week-long insanity, and it seems a good thing. And art, of course."

"Art, yes, is another madness. A writer once said that a novel is an ideal plane inserted into reality. An alternate world, the perception of which is a form of insanity. I can't remember his name. It was a quote on the inside of Fourier's book."

"Fourier! You've read *The Circular Gardens*?"

"No, I haven't read it. I wish I had. Everyone's talking about it. The apotheosis of the age, I've heard it called."

"Well, how do you know about it?"

"Two weeks ago I had occasion to journey to Westonia. I saw it in a bookstore there. I picked it up and read only the promotional blurb and some of the quotes on the first page. The one about ideal planes struck me, in particular."

"Damn!" said Wakeman, "You don't know what I'd give for a copy of that novel."

"Rumors are that the novel has been withdrawn. Fourier is said to be dissatisfied with a section of it. At great personal expense he has bought up all unsold copies and plans to release a new edition."

"How do you know this?" inquired Wakeman.

"Well, I don't know it, exactly," replied Arget, after taking a drink of his beer. "But rumors abound among his small circle of acquaintances."

"You've met him?" said Wakeman.

"Yes, of course."

"But how?"

"Why, I've visited his mansion. Once every few days he dispatches his helicopter and flies a few guests up to the top of Mount Immanuel. Most of his circle is thoroughly ignorable. He is particularly close, for instance, to the mayor, whom I've seen several times at the mansion. Occasionally, however, Fourier invites a few guests with

listenable conversation."

Wakeman leaned forward in rapt attention. "Tell me, what's he like? Tell me all about him."

"Not much to tell, actually. Quiet sort of chap. Extraordinarily wealthy. He's the heir of the Fourier computer fortune, you know. He's reclusive, meditative. Artistically, however, he may be nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Yes. Another rumor is that he didn't write that novel."

"What? Who wrote it then?"

Arget merely smiled and shook his head. One of the men at the table nearby had evidently overheard the conversation, because he said, "Arget wrote it! That's who!" He raised his mug and yelled, "Here's to Arget!"

Wakeman looked back at Arget. The man was grinning in apparent embarrassment and shaking his head. "You will forgive the misdirected enthusiasm of my proletarian friends. Just because I've met with a small degree of artistic success, they get carried away. To answer your question, it is rumored that Fourier employed a ghost writer."

"How bizarre! One hears of ghost writers in connection with autobiographies and so forth, but rarely with novels. What could be his motives?"

"It is fruitless to guess at motives, especially with regard to such a reclusive, enigmatic character as Fourier."

"Well, whoever wrote it, I'd like to meet him," said Wakeman. Then he told Arget about his association with Gabriel, the upcoming film, Gabriel's inability to meet Fourier, his own position at the University.

"Why, the next time I visit Fourier's estate I shall mention you and Mr. Gabriel, and your project."

"He already knows about the film," said Wakeman.

"That's why Gabriel can't understand his inaccessibility."

"Oh, of course. He would know about the film. Well, perhaps I could intercede in some fashion. If you will give me your phone number, I could give you a call after my next visit to the estate."

Wakeman wrote his and Gabriel's numbers on the back of a napkin.

Arget took the napkin and said, "Well, it is late, and there is much more of the Festival to enjoy. I must rest myself for the coming abandonment." He shook Wakeman's hand and went out the door.

Having been warmed and mellowed by two mugs of beer, Wakeman began to regret the fight with Wharton. The very idea, two university professors slugging it out in the middle of the night because they happen to be at the same

place at the same time. He payed his tab and left the bar, intending to have a look at Wharton.

As Wakeman approached the park and the arch within it, he saw that there was a man there, just rising from the damp pavement and stumbling around. But, as the man turned in Wakeman's direction, Wakeman saw he was not Wharton. He was not Wharton though he stood in the same area in which Wakeman had flattened his colleague and left him sprawled on the pavement, though his hair and clothes were wet and in disarray from contact with the pavement just as Wharton's should be. The person Wakeman now saw stumbling about, as if directionless, was his--Wakeman's--twin brother. He had to be his twin, because he was not Wakeman.

One time under the influence of hallucinogens Wakeman had looked into a mirror and for an instant could not distinguish subject and object. The experience that night was similar. The twin even wore an overcoat that appeared identical to Wakeman's own.

Wakeman froze in stupefaction. The twin hadn't looked over. He had picked up his hat (which may also have resembled Wakeman's, a possibility which, due to the darkness, was difficult to determine) and was stumbling away. Paralyzed at first, Wakeman started after him. He yelled, but with no sign the twin had heard. The man had

reached the far corner of the plaza, where he stopped for a moment, then disappeared down the stairs to Berkeley Avenue.

By the time Wakeman reached the stairway, he could see the *doppleganger* no longer. And when he arrived at the bottom of the stairs, there was no sight of the man in any direction. After a moment of hesitation, Wakeman turned from the alley and started home.

It was fortunate that he did not delay longer, because a pleasant surprise was waiting for him in his apartment.

CHAPTER SIX

Substrata. I.

I must be remote: I cannot concern myself yet with the incipient stirrings and rumbles of the Festival. For it is Inman who requires my major attention. I imagined his journey--through the hospital and the city's labyrinthine streets--and his ascent up the mountainside below me. Now he wanders my mansion. He wanders through empty salons and mirrored ballrooms, up curved staircases with gilded balustrades, along the carpeted hallways that wind circuitously through the mansion and rejoin themselves at myriad junctures. His is a long journey, and it must be undertaken alone.

I walk into my private theater, where I will entertain myself with a film while waiting for Inman to complete his journey. Perhaps later I will wander into the conservatory and play my piano.

[Here was a break in the text.]

Inman had wandered for a lengthy period in the mansion. At length he walked into a small room with three doors. One was gold, one was silver, the other red. Inman stood looking at the doors for an interval, then

walked towards the silver door.

The sound of the door closing behind him reverberated for several seconds. Inman had entered a tremendous chamber. Perhaps he felt a moment of disorientation: though the mansion was tremendous, the fact of it accommodating a hall of such truly epic proportions was inconceivable. He stepped out into the chamber and looked into the distance. The lighting was dim; to both Inman's right and left, there was no apparent end to the hall. He chose a direction and walked away, his heels clicking on the polished marble floors and echoing around the great open spaces of the hall.

Perhaps the size of the chamber began to intimidate Inman. He began trying the doors that lined this portion of the hall. Perhaps he wanted to return to the anterior chamber with three doors. But there were several doors along the hallway, any of which could be the one to provide egress to the chamber. Moreover, Inman could not even be sure on which side of the hallway he should look for the door: perhaps in an effort to get his bearings, he had turned several times in a circle, an act that had the effect of causing him to lose all bearings. Inman walked to each side of the hall and tried several doors. They were all locked.

There was only one thing to do.

He started walking.

Inman had walked several minutes when the sound of multiple footsteps became audible. He stopped to listen. But all that was audible were reverberations, then silence. Nothing could be determined about the reverberations about their origin. Inman began walking again. Soon the impression of multiple footsteps returned. It seemed that the sound originated both in front of Inman and to his rear. Inman stopped again, listening. But as before, reverberations were all that were audible.

As soon as he started walking again, another figure became visible. The figure was far in front of Inman, walking in the same direction. The walker would not have been visible at all if the light from an open door hadn't played, briefly, over his features. Inman looked as if about to hail the man, perhaps to ask directions, but didn't. This was good, for such a sound might have defiled the vast, solemn hall. And in an instant, the man was visible no more. His footsteps clicked off into the distance. Soon the sound was imperceptible.

Then came the sound of talking and music. It started out as a whisper. At this point it was ignorable, seeming possibly a mere acoustical anomaly. But then, slowly, it intensified. At length Inman stopped and appeared to listen closely. This time, the sound could not be mistak-

en for mere reverberations. It was the sound of voices, many of them, rising and falling in pitch and amplitude, perhaps in song. One pictured a choir, somewhere in the remote distance, singing in a vast chamber.

Again, Inman stopped. He stood listening to the singing and looking down the great hall. Now it seemed that the choir was mixed with the clink of ice cubes, and perhaps the almost inaudible noises of revelry.

My guests are sometimes excessively noisy.

Inman resumed his journey, and continued walking until he came upon what appeared to be an exhibit. In a plexiglass case in the center of the hall was a vase. The display was lit brighter than the rest of the hall; a cone of light shone down, thick with suspended dust, from a spotlight on the ceiling far above. There was information about the vase on a plaque attached to the exhibit. Inman stopped and read it. Perhaps he felt it was put there for him to see. According to the plaque, the vase was a specimen of native geometric art dating from approximately three millenea ago. While many such specimens existed, this one was significant for the extent of its preservation, and for the fact that it had been unearthed at the same archeological dig as the Universal Tablets.

A flickering lamp on the wall attracted Inman's attention away from the vase. Inman finished viewing the

exhibit and reading the plaque and proceeded onward. The only sound in the museum was his footsteps. The lighting was minimal, provided by lamps mounted at regular but distant intervals on the walls. Each lamp spread a small oval of paleness on the wall behind it.

The great hall seemed to have no limits. There were no obvious exit points, nor did Inman come to any point at which he would have been forced to turn back. He seemed to take special care to restrict his journey to one direction only. Thus it was perhaps with great astonishment that he came again to the vase. Perhaps he thought at first that he had merely come to an exhibit similar to the one he had already noted. But why would not both vases be displayed in one case? Why have two identical exhibits?

Somewhere within the great pool of reverberations that spread out in the dark hall from Inman's minutest movement came again the sound of music. This time it seemed as if one could hear a piano mixed with the voices. Perhaps Inman thought that if he could just find this orchestra, which was playing in such an improbable place, one of the musicians might help him find an exit.

But first he had to get his bearings. He turned his attention back to the vase. Probably he was thinking that he had to determine whether he had doubled back to the exhibit, or whether he beheld an entirely different,

though similar, vase. Inman stepped over the rope railing around the exhibit and put his face up to the glass case. There was nothing especially notable about the vase. It was rather plain-looking. On top, it spread out around the small, flared mouth, then gradually narrowed toward the base. It was very prettily decorated, with a number of concentric circles and other geometric designs on its upper part. The lower area depicted a series of identical warriors, holding shields and spears. The warriors followed each other around the vase. This was clearly a feature of the vase seen earlier. Moreover, the descriptive plaque attached to the exhibit seemed a verbatim reprise of the earlier one. The two vases were, for all one could tell, one and the same.

There was a lamp mounted on the wall nearby. It was not noticeable at first because there was no light shining inside it. Perhaps Inman remembered that there was also a light near the first vase exhibit, one of the very few he had encountered since entering the hall. It seemed that this lamp was positioned exactly the same in relation to the exhibit as the first one. The only difference was that the first one was lit and this one was not. But hadn't the light in the first sign been flickering, as does a bulb sometimes before it burns out?

Inman seemed unable to decide about the vase or the

light. He stepped back and looked around. Perhaps he felt the urge to urinate, to find a bathroom. A bathroom is always a good place in which to get hold of oneself.

Inman had not gone far he came to a corridor branching off to the side of the main hallway. Perhaps there was someone in the hallway who could direct Inman out of the hall, perhaps someone connected with the music. But my guests have quietened: no longer is there music, just the echo of Inman's footsteps in the great hall.

Inman entered the smaller corridor. The floor was covered with a deep pile carpeting. This was necessary because one tires of the constant sound of tapping footsteps. Inman walked for approximately twenty yards before he came to a door. He opened it. Behind the door was more darkness and a dim light several yards away. Inman had entered yet another hallway, this one much narrower even than the one off which it branched. He entered the hallway and walked toward the light. In seconds Inman stood outside another door, partly opened. The sound of a slight fast clicking came from the room. Inman pushed the door open and walked into the room.

Inside was a large wooden table, most likely used for conferences, around which were arranged several chairs. There were a number of glasses on the table. Some contained the remains of what appeared to be cocktails.

There were also several ashtrays, each containing cigarette butts. On a table at the far end of the room sat a film projector, directed through a hole in the wall. One of its wheels was in motion, the other stationary. The tape had all wound around the moving wheel. The clicking sound was coming from the end of the tape as the turning wheel caused it to hit the frame of the projector, over and over.

Inman walked over to the recorder and switched it off. The room was now so quiet that one could hear the vague humming of the fluorescent lamps. The lamps, which were recessed into the ceiling, bathed the room in a pale glow.

Such an intensity of silence could not last, thus when Inman heard the sound of the piano it was, perhaps, as if he had expected it. It was coming from the other side of a door leading off the room in which he stood. Inman reached for the door knob. It turned soundlessly in his hand, and the door swung open.

Wakeman sat looking out the picture window of Gabriel's Mount Immanuel headquarters, waiting for the director to finish reading the sections of *The Circular Gardens*. The view of the city here was stunning. From the window he could see quite plainly the train tracks that spread

out in concentric circles from their source in the Crystal Palace: the exterior track that united the far suburbs of Bonneville looping into invisibility behind Mount Immanuel in the near distance, reappearing in the far skirting the lower slopes of the Ramparts; the inner tracks that served the thickly populated urban neighborhoods, dropping underground in some sections of their routes, reappearing in others, and disappearing again in the towered commercial district and under the all-encompassing glass roof of the Crystal Palace. The glass flashed with the afternoon sun and the snowcapped peaks of the Ramparts gleamed white all around. And on the slopes in front of him, the pinks, whites, and yellows of what was left standing of the Mount Immanuel district simmered quietly in the sun, unaware of the destruction in their midst.

Wakeman was exhausted: the fight with Wharton, the sight of his *doppelganger*, and then the appearance of the new fragment had prevented him, the night before, from sleeping more than a few hours.

After arriving home, he had been still restless. He decided to print out the first fragment of the novel in preparation for meeting with Gabriel. And when he switched on his computer, he found to his amazement another file (Gardens II) related to *The Circular Gardens*! Had the CompuLink system leaked another section of the novel

into his computer, or had it been there all along? Wakeman had printed out both files and brought them to Gabriel.

At last the director put down the the pages. There followed a long pause, during which he stood up and began pacing around the room. His face was a mask of puzzlement and exasperation.

"These sections you brought are a help. But they leave us with little to do. Except for that in the mental ward scene, there is very little dialogue or purposive action."

"I see what you mean," said Wakeman. "Your screenwriter is left idle."

"No, that's not it. Your salary is the least of my concern. Moreover, you've brought me what little I do have of the novel. It's just that . . . how are we supposed to make a film if we don't know where this leads? What is this "substrata" and where is section two of it? Who is insane in this book, Inman or Fourier? And what are we supposed to make of these vast halls, this movie projector, this vase? What do they mean?"

"Maybe they don't mean anything. . . ."

"Heaven forbid that I've started a movie that won't mean anything!"

"Well, they probably mean *something*, or the book

wouldn't be so popular."

"So popular? How can it be popular if no one can find the blasted thing?"

"You're right," mused Wakeman. "It's just an impression I have, I guess. Everywhere I turn, there's something about *The Circular Gardens*. Just last night I ran into someone who claims to have met Fourier."

"Met him! When? Where?"

At this point there came the sound of a door closing down the hallway. Then Diana entered the room.

"Hello," she said to Wakeman. Then she turned to Gabriel. "I've been trying to phone Anne Wilde for the last hour. Finally I got through to the office, but there was only a recording. I left a message."

Gabriel collapsed into in a chair. "It's not surprising. Did either of you see the morning news? Near civil war is rumored in the capital. No one in their right mind is out and about in that."

"My God," said Wakeman. "What's brought this about so suddenly?"

"No one seems to have a clear idea. It seems to involve two factions in parliament, each of which have military support. The roads are blocked leading into Westonia. All but the most essential goods and services are being turned away."

"It blew up so suddenly, I wonder what--"

"But to return to more pressing matters," interrupted Gabriel, "I may, unfortunately, have to drop this film. In a week and a half, the script is supposed to be finished. It seemed that my career was about to take off, but then this damned civil war, or whatever it is, had to intervene. Frank Arswine has got the contract, I haven't much doubt."

To Wakeman's surprise (the young woman seemed almost non-verbal), Diana disagreed. "There is no reason to believe that Arswine has not run into the same problems as you. In view of the political turmoil, surely there will be an extension."

"You could give it a little more time," added Wakeman. "I was just about to tell you about the man who'd met Fourier. His name is Arget. I didn't get his first name. He says Fourier brings guests to his estate via helicopter."

"Ha! Why am I not invited? Presumably, this film is being made with Fourier's consent, if not with his participation. You would think he would want to meet me, at least!"

The phone rang. Diana started for the office, but Gabriel jumped up from the chair and bounded ahead of her. "I'll get it," he said.

Diana sat down on a stool at the bar next to Wakeman. "Poor Bruno. A novel could be written about his own puzzling situation. Did he tell you about our own helicopter?"

"No."

"Well, he just hasn't gotten around to it yet. We actually rented a helicopter and tried to visit Fourier this morning. But the only place to land was occupied by Fourier's own helicopter. We flew over and over the place, but couldn't find any place to land. And then, someone started shooting at us."

"Shooting?"

"Well, I don't know if we were actually being shot at. Maybe we were just being warned. We were never hit. But there was a man on the ground, shooting into the air."

Gabriel had returned.

"I was just telling him about the helicopter," said Diana.

"Gabriel nodded. It pisses me off that I'm supposed to make this man's book into a film, and I can't even get in to see him."

"But how was he supposed to know your intentions, or even that it was you?" replied Wakeman. "Why don't you try calling him?"

"No phone or number unavailable."

". . . or write?"

"We tried that too, but never got a reply. That was a week ago."

"Well, to return to my story about Monsieur Arget, he offered to intercede in our behalf," said Wakeman. "I gave him my telephone number."

Gabriel looked thoughtful. "That would be great. But in the meantime, I wonder how much it would help if we talked with someone who has read the book."

"You wonder!" said Wakeman. "Of course it would help. Do you know someone?"

"Actually, I do," said Gabriel. "Diana's twin brother."

"Her brother?" said Wakeman.

"He was the man Wilde referred me to originally, who took me on the tour I told you about at the party. That's how I met Diana."

"You mean your family lives in this area?" Wakeman said to Diana.

"And I also," Diana replied.

Wakeman shook his head. "Well, why haven't you consulted with her brother before this?"

Gabriel looked at Diana. "It's a bit complicated. You see, Daniel has been away. Actually, he is or was mentally ill. He has spent the last few days in St.

Superflua's mental ward."

Then it came back to Wakeman. In the whirl of fantasies called the Festival, in his activities at the university and on behalf of the film, he had almost forgotten his own brief sojourn in the mental ward. He had almost written it off as a dream.

"What's wrong?" laughed Gabriel. "You look white as a sheet."

"I have something to tell you. It's kind of strange. For a few hours I too was in that mental ward--"

"So who isn't?" interrupted Gabriel. "The whole damn city needs to be there during Festival."

"Maybe so," said Wakeman. "But I . . . well, I escaped. This strange old doctor named McX helped me, and--"

"McWho?"

"McX." Wakeman spelled the name.

"How bizarre."

"Well, it's a long story," continued Wakeman. "The reason I brought it up is that I wanted to tell you that I think I met . . . Daniel is his name? . . . while I was there. He was going on about some strange book."

"It must have been *The Circular Gardens*," said Gabriel. "Tell him the history, Diana."

"My brother has always been a loner, a sad boy," said

Diana. "But never psychotic. Then, a couple of weeks ago, he disappeared for two or three days. Something mysterious happened, and he turned up in the mental ward. Now he seems to have delusions about Fourier, about the end of the world, practically everything."

"Has he said anything specific about the book?" said Wakeman.

"No. . ." said Diana. "But it's hard to understand what he's talking about lately."

"That book was responsible for the most absurd fracas in that mental ward," said Wakeman. "I'm glad I didn't know its title at the time. Or anything about the mystery it's become. I might have been struck to paralysis or something. Anyway, I'd like to meet Daniel again, and find out what he knows about that book."

"Well, in a few minutes," said Gabriel, "you will probably do just that. That is, if you're still interested in renting an apartment in the area. That phone call was from Diana's mother. We had told her to be on the lookout for a place for you. It seems that she's come through. And she also told me that Daniel is home. He too, it seems, has escaped from St. Superflua's mental ward."

The Eidle dwelling was even further up the mountain

than Gabriel's headquarters. It was in a tightly packed area of large homes, painted bright blues, whites, yellows, most of which adjoined one another, many of which were built into the mountain itself. The area seemed relatively undamaged by the earthquake.

The threesome entered the dwelling, passed through a small foyer, and entered the living room. The room seemed in twilight: only one wall contained windows, and they were heavily curtained. Wakeman could see nothing, and had to feel his way into the room. Gabriel, who brought up the rear, took his arm and steered him over to a sofa.

"Mrs. Eidle: Thomas Wakeman," said Gabriel. "The man looking for an apartment."

Wakeman by this time was able to make out an amorphous shape in a corner of the room. A voice emanated from the corner.

"Strange things happen in this part of the city," said the voice, which was low both in pitch and volume, and utterly flat of emphasis. Wakeman could see where Diana got her mannerisms.

"Oh, Mrs. Eidle, don't exaggerate," said Gabriel.

"How do you do?" said Wakeman.

A dim light was shining from what Wakeman supposed was a kitchen. Aided thus, he was eventually able to make out some of the features of the woman across the room.

She seemed a middle aged version of her daughter. She was nearly as spare of frame as Diana. And she wore her dark hair long, in a fashion similar to her daughter's. She held some knitting materials in her lap.

"I'm not exaggerating, Mr. Gabriel," came the reply.
"Diana, tell your friends about the alley."

Diana looked over, and with as expressionless a voice as her mother's, said, "The alley outside, that runs behind the house. You used to be able to take it to Stromberg. Now it goes to the market."

"A result of the earthquake, no doubt," laughed Gabriel. "Don't scare Wakeman away. He needs to live in this part of the city. It'll inspire him in writing the script."

A long silence followed, which to Wakeman seemed full of disapproval of the director's skepticism. "The apartment overlooks the market square," said Mrs. Eidle. "It is a fairly modern building, and it is built to earthquake codes. The owners have fled Mount Immanuel. They desire only a small rent. But it is a big apartment. They have entrusted me with lease documents and a key."

"It sounds attractive," said Wakeman.

"Diana, call your brother," said Mrs. Eidle. "He will show you the way."

Diana disappeared.

"How is Mr. Eidle getting along in his work?" said Gabriel, who jingled the keys in his pockets a minute, then sat back down.

"There is much left to do," replied Mrs. Eidle.

"Diana's father is working to clear the rubble out of the area," explained Gabriel to Wakeman.

A minute later Diana and a young man entered the room. The man looked very much like Diana, dark and slim, his complexion smooth and translucent. He stopped and looked at Gabriel and Wakeman. His gaze froze on the latter. Through the gloom, Wakeman saw a look of horror take possession of his face.

"Daniel Eidle: Thomas Wakeman," said Gabriel.

Wakeman rose in confusion, unable to tear his gaze away from the young man's huge, frightened brown eyes. This was indeed the Daniel who had warned him, so insistently, to "get out of the circle."

"What's wrong. . . ." Gabriel began.

"He said you had to get out of the circle," said Daniel.

"He speaks of himself in the third person lately when he gets upset," said Mrs. Eidle. "Danny, don't get upset."

"They all think he's crazy," said Daniel. "But he's just . . . double-exposed, like film."

"One of his favorite expressions lately," said Mrs. Eidle. "He won't explain what it means. Will you tell us what you mean, Danny?"

Wakeman had sat down. Daniel had backed away toward the window. He looked around the room, then back at Wakeman. "He hadn't read it all then," he said. "He never got to read it all. He had to give it to the old man."

"Who made you, the orderlies? You mean you had to give it to McX?" said Wakeman.

The young man almost shouted in reply. "He's evil! Evil! Daniel will have to kill him!"

"Perhaps we should just go," said Gabriel.

"I know where the apartment is anyway," said Diana, tonelessly.

At this point, Daniel moved away from the window and stood in the center of the room, looking down at Wakeman. "He doesn't understand. He's double-exposed. He doesn't know what's in the blank spaces, and he doesn't know the end. He doesn't know if he can change things, but he must try. He wants to warn you, that you will kill two times in your search for him."

Wakeman managed to croak, "Who's . . . 'him'?"

In response the young man walked over to the window and pointed upward, in the direction of the mountain's

summit. "Up there."

"You mean Fourier?" said Gabriel, who was sitting erect on the edge of his seat, his gaze fastened on the young man. "Why don't you tell us a little more about his book? Did you have it when you first met Thomas, in the mental ward?"

With this, Daniel turned and strode to the door. "He warns you again, you will kill trying to get to him. Watch out who."

Gabriel looked over at Wakeman, his eyebrows arched. "Somehow he seems to have incorporated you into his delusions. And the book, too, maybe. He sounds like some kind of prophet. And what he's saying seems strangely apocalyptic."

"My Danny is not a prophet, he's just a normal boy," said Mrs. Eidle. "I know he doesn't talk normal, but he's not a prophet. I could destroy that mental ward. When he came out, he talked like a lunatic."

"They experiment on their patients," said Wakeman absently. "The medicine is too powerful. . . ."

"No, it wasn't any medicine," replied Mrs. Halvorsen. "It was that damn book."

"Where did he get the book?" said Wakeman, weakly.

"I'm not sure, but I think he got it up there. After he was hired to watch that studio's properties, he spent a

lot of time on the upper slope in people's houses, that had fled. One day he was fine, the next he seems anxious-like. The he disappears, and the hospital calls and tells us Danny jumps of a bridge. And then when we visit he's talking all this nonsense about comets, messiahs, and some name. What is it? Somebody Inman."

"Inman is a character in the book, *The Circular Gardens*," explained Gabriel. "Maybe if we questioned him more precisely. . . ."

"No," said Mrs. Eidle. "You get nowhere. It just agitates Danny."

"Well, let's go see the apartment," said Gabriel, rising.

"I hope you like it," said Mrs. Eidle.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Bonneville Channel Six News has uncovered important new information about the turmoil in Westonia. For three days now, viewers have been hearing shocking rumors of an insurrection in the capital, rumors of near civil war. No one, however, has been able to furnish adequate background to the conflict until now. According to highly placed sources, a faction of the armed forces have occupied Parliament. In a well-coordinated move, these forces captured all the radio and television stations in Westonia and forced total news blackout. Little is known of the motivation behind the coup, though it is said that the generals leading the coup believe that the planet is under extreme danger.

"Channel Six has learned that a prominent astronomer at the National University, Carl Burke, has discovered an unexplained course change in Pacelli's Comet. The comet's core may have collided with an asteroid. Based on Burke's projections, the comet will *not*, repeat, will *not*, collide with the planet, but it will pass uncomfortably close.

"This information seems to have been assimilated into the doctrines of a bizarre new cult. The cult is demanding a nuclear strike against the comet as a means of saving the planet. The generals leading the coup are

adherents of this cult. Such a strike is opposed in Parliament and by the majority of military officers, and is not supported by the scientific community. Even Burke opposes such a move as unnecessary, and perhaps damaging to the earth. We still know little about the cult, but it is said to have adherents in Bonneville. We will be making efforts to contact these persons to further examine their views.

"The coup, though it was successful in taking over Parliament, is not without opposition. Yesterday, forces under General Walter Thornton approached Parliament, and defeated, after a seven hour battle, the coup's forces near the building. Then they lay seige to Parliament itself. In other parts of the city fighting continues between coup forces and those still loyal to the government. It is too early to say who has the upper hand.

"This is all we know about the situation. Stay tuned to Channel Six for further information."

Wakeman raised his brow. A coup headed by a clique of mystic generals? He turned the station.

". . . another accident in the Crystal Palace. It occurred at the intersection of Circles One and Two, with damage done to a transit car on Circle Two. Initial

reports are that damage is not extensive, although several passengers were injured. Transit authorities say that Circle Two will be closed for investigation and repairs until mid-day tomorrow. The problem, say authorities, was in a faulty switch. Critics are saying, however, that the Transit Authority, in trying to economize, has assigned too many trains to too few tracks. Several lines must share the same tracks within the terminal. While the distance is short, the risk of collision grows with each new expansion, each new addition of cars, each improvement in schedule and convenience. What is needed is reorganization and the construction of several more tracks within the terminal.

"Another problem, say critics, might be in the central computer which handles switching and coordinates the movements of the cars. No such problem existed before the department upgraded to a Fourier B2000 mainframe.

"Meanwhile--it's Festival time, folks--stories have come to our attention of strange occurrences on the transit system. We now go to Charles Battleberry, in the Crystal Palace. Charles, what can you tell us?"

"Milt, I have with me Ms. Alexandra Trueticket, a noted commentator on the Festival. Ms. Trueticket, what about these 'strange occurrences' on the trains? What's going on?"

"Charles, I was at a ball last night at which we had a virtual panel discussion of these happenings. One woman said that she had gotten on the train one evening and skipped the entire next day."

"Skipped a day!"

"That's right. She got on the train Monday evening to go to the ball and when she got off it was Tuesday evening. She got to the ball a day late. Luckily, it was still going. But her husband thinks she spent the time with another man and is divorcing her. And then there are the stories of people finding themselves riding transit lines other than the ones they got on, and people getting lost right here in the Crystal Palace. They describe it as like walking around in a great labyrinth, with no way out. They can't find the correct boarding points, the boarding points become those for other routes, and so forth. And one man told me he spent the entire night in the men's room, because he couldn't find the way out!"

"Ms. Trueticket, what do think is at the bottom of all this? It's just the Festival, isn't it? A sort of mass hysteria?"

"Charles, this time I think it is more than just the Festival, though certainly the Festival is involved. I think that we are seeing the beginnings of a new age, a new spirit in which we will be freed from the old tyran-

nies: linear time, cause and effect, and so forth. The fact that this new spirit begins in the Festival shows that it is born of eros, mutability, chaos, sensuality, wine. We are definitely entering a Dionysian age of endless celebration. And with this new cult thing, this end of the world business--the comet and all--we have a whole new aspect to the new spirit: that is, celebration of our own end, our own destruction."

"So the new age will not last for long?"

"Well, I don't know enough about the apocalyptic side of it to say. But I do think our whole conception of natural law will change. We may enter an age of *both* our endless destruction and our endless renewal. Down with linear time! Down with natural law! Down with the mutually exclusive!"

Wakeman punched a button and the television went blank. He walked out the door and through the drizzle down to the Crystal Palace. There he threaded his way through a profusion of underpasses, escalators, and conveyor belts to arrive at the boarding platform on the innermost circle--Circle Seven. A train was waiting.

A few minutes later Wakeman disembarked the train and walked out into the North Plaza station. Despite himself, he found himself looking closely at his surroundings for

signs of change. Aside from the usual bustle of costumed revelers, everything seemed normal. A new spirit! A new age freed from linear time! Wakeman laughed to himself and walked out of the station and onto the square.

A few minutes later he was looking in the window of Doc's. Arget was not there. Wakeman didn't want to enter and risk a conversation with the burly dockworkers who sat motionless now at their table, as if they had not moved since his last visit. He left the scene as it was and walked off. Soon he had crossed a corner of the plaza and entered a narrow street which he knew would take him to another quarter of clubs. First he would have to walke through a sector of old quaint row houses.

The drizzle had changed back to mist. This was the type of weather Wakeman liked the best for walking around. A fog covered the city like a thick layer of mystery. Boundaries between things had become ambiguous. The buildings seemed to jut upward into the fog at odd angles. It seemed to Wakeman that the buildings, the streets, the fog were so arranged as to symbolically convey some dark, hidden meaning of which he was a central part. He would have to unlock the symbolism to understand what it was. An old dog walked out from behind some garbage cans and stared at Wakeman stupidly. As Wakeman walked under a street light, it switched off. A little further, Wakeman

saw a movement in the covered doorway of an abandoned brick building. A dark figure sat up on a mattress. A man with invisible face said "hey." Wakeman walked onward. After a while he came to a traffic light. There was something fascinating about it. He stood for a few moments in the mist, watching it change back and forth between red, yellow, green. There was no traffic. Wakeman could hear the electronic switch closing in the light as it switched colors. He began to have a sensation of synchronicity, and became acutely conscious that the minutest event was accompanied by other events. The traffic light changed; behind him the vagrant moved on his mattress. The old dog crossed the street; the street light switched back on. Somewhere in Bonneville Gabriel and Diana made love. Wakeman stood motionless, a million little points of mist falling all around him, disintegrating as they made contact with the pavement and the dark buildings. It was the tiny, incremental movements of a finely calibrated machine. . . .

Every part was necessary. And it all had meaning.

Wakeman stood like this for several minutes before he began to feel again the necessity of movement. He looked around and saw that he was in a deserted section of old warehouses. How had he come here? He thought he knew well the route to the quarter of bars he sought. By now

he should have been walking the streets of the quaint residential area near the bars. The night was very dark, so dark that the moist glow yielded by the occasional streetlight seemed encased in layers of black iron. Wakeman started walking again. He came to an intersection of two alleys. He stood there a moment, undecided as to what direction to take. Then a sound came from down the alley. Wakeman looked closer and saw there was a light shining dimly from the side of a building. He hadn't noticed it before.

Maybe the light came from a bar. Wakeman walked down the alley, stepping around garbage cans and piles of debris. He heard scurrying sounds and a rat darted out of one of the piles and into another. Wakeman listened for sounds of merriment coming from the lighted building. There were none. At length he stood in front of a plate glass window.

There was no evidence of a bar. Behind the window were shelves, and a man standing motionless behind a counter. He looked like a mannequin. The window was too dirty to see what the shelves held. A sign on the front door said "Open."

Above the sign were inscribed the words "Sam's Books."

Wakeman was curious to see what kind of bookstore was

open at this time of the morning, which was about one A.M. He opened the door and walked in.

Wakeman had the feeling that the bookstore somehow "started up" at his entry. The previously motionless man behind the counter was now writing in a ledger. He looked up briefly but returned to his work without saying anything. It was as if customers were not unusual in this shop in a dark alley at one o'clock in the morning.

Wakeman decided to inspect the store. In the area in front of the sales desk was an area of new, hardback books. It was divided into the usual sections: aisles for science, biography, and the like. Wakeman went directly to the fiction aisle and looked for his novels. He found one of them, the most recent, *Behind the Curtain*. Fourier's *The Circular Gardens*, naturally, was not to be found.

Wakeman walked up to the sales counter and asked the clerk for assistance. The clerk was working with his back turned.

"Yes," he said, turning around and looking over his glasses. He was a short, stocky man of about sixty, with thinning gray hair. "I looked it up for a customer a week or two ago. I'm sure we don't stock the book, though. Especailly if it was published in Westonia. All shipments from Westonia have stopped. Want me to look it up?"

"No," Wakeman replied. "There's no point in that if

you don't stock the book."

Curious about the store, he continued: "This is the first time I've come here. You must not get many customers at this time of day."

"You'd be surprised," said the man. He looked over his glasses at Wakeman a moment and turned back to his work.

Wakeman was about to leave when he noticed a door to the side of the sales desk. Craning his head around, he saw an even larger room crammed with book-filled shelves.

"Is that section open to the public?" Wakeman asked the sales clerk.

"Sure," said the clerk. "Just used books in there. Thousands of them."

Wakeman was an aficionado of used book stores, so he walked with anticipation into the room. He had trouble finding the classics and modern classics sections: the room was without aisle markers. At length, however, he found them, at the center of a labyrinthine arrangement of shelves. He had no trouble locating weatherbeaten copies of his own novels.

As he looked over his books, Wakeman heard the clerk talking with someone. "I know what you mean," said the clerk. "I used to put all the books I thought were good right out front, in clear view, thinking they might do the

world some good if enough people would read them. But anymore, I hide them at the back of the stacks, hoping no one will find them."

Wakeman had collected three of his books and was about to turn away when he remembered he hadn't looked for *The Circular Gardens* in the used stacks. He turned back and walked to the F section. In seconds he had set down the copies of his own novels and held a copy, torn, battered, and falling apart, of *The Circular Gardens*. For a recently published novel, it certainly was in poor condition, thought Wakeman. He leafed through the novel in anticipation, but the light was too dim and the book threatened to disintegrate, so he gave up.

Wakeman made his way to the sales desk. The other customer was gone. The clerk rang up Wakeman's purchase. "Ah, found a copy, did you?" he said, looking at the title. "Want a bag?"

"No, I'll just carry it in my pocket," replied Wakeman. He turned and walked out again into the the wet, dripping city, and soon the bookstore was hidden deep down its alley behind a layer of thick fog.

Wakeman quickly retraced his steps back to the square. He wanted to get back home quickly so as to examine the battered novel in his pocket. Tomorrow, he would find Gabriel and triumphantly present him with the

book. He could visualize the director's gratitude.

Having reached again the square, Wakeman stopped and took the novel out of his coat pocket. It was too dark to read: he was moving toward a light when he heard the sound of steps. Then there were several men entering the square from the alley he'd just exited. They were walking rapidly in his direction. He put the novel back in his pocket and moved warily off. "Hey," said one the men. His voice echoed around the square. Then the whole group started running toward Wakeman. He started running himself, but too late. One of the men caught up with him in front of the arch. He grabbed Wakeman's sleeve.

"Hey, stop," the man commanded.

Wakeman shook himself free and was about to proceed onwards when the rest of the group ran up. They circled around him.

The men were looking at Wakeman curiously. One of them said, "Give it up."

Wakeman stood silently, said nothing. A few tense seconds followed. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the squirrel Wharton had startled the night before. It sat on the ground in the park, nibbling on something, it's tail a question mark.

"Want to empty your pockets?" said one of the men. His tone was ominous, overbearing.

"I don't have much, but you can have it," Wakeman said. He pulled his wallet out of his pocket and handed it to one of the men.

One man, tall and strong-looking, seemed to be in command. He said, "Now empty your pockets."

"I don't have anything else," Wakeman said. "Except my keys. He took out the keys, feeling the slight bulge of the book in his pocket as he did so. He ignored it. What use would robbers have with a battered old book?

Then the man who'd just spoken nodded to the others. Both Wakeman's arms were grabbed and he felt hands groping in his pockets. As one of the men moved, his jacket opened and Wakeman saw for an instant what appeared to be a badge.

"You're police! You can't just search me like this! I have civil rights."

The men didn't answer. The book was pulled out and handed to the man who seemed in charge. He looked at it a moment, then put it in his own pocket. He nodded again. The men let go of Wakeman, moved back a a short distance.

The man in command started to hand Wakeman his wallet and keys, but thought better of it and put them in his pocket.

"At least give me the book and keys," Wakeman demanded. "What use could you have with either of them? I'll

have my locks changed before you can break into my house."

The men started to move off. Incredulously, Wakeman yelled, "At least return the book! Goddamn it, what use can you have with a beat-up old book?"

The men ignored Wakeman and continued walking away. Anger suddenly surged within him. Losing all caution, he yelled, "Goddamn it, you low scum, you thieves."

A light switched on in a building across the square. Someone was looking out a window.

"Call the police! Call the police!" Wakeman yelled, before remembering that these men might be police.

The men were walking off through the park, ignoring Wakeman's exclamations.

Suddenly something streaked across the short area of pavement between Wakeman and the park and raced up his leg.

Then he was spinning around frantically, not able to comprehend what was happening. Something was under his overcoat, circling his waist, round and round, at the belt-line. It was a live creature of some sort. Wakeman followed it around with his hands, trying to trap it, force it downwards. He expected to be bitten at any second. He could feel the creature's sharp little claws digging into his flesh. But the thing wouldn't be caught: it just kept forcing itself, with amazing strength and

determination, around Wakeman's waist.

In the midst of all this, it occurred to Wakeman that he must be creating quite a scene, cursing and jumping around. The men had stopped in the park and stood in a line, staring at him.

At last he had the presence of mind to unbutton his overcoat. He performed this operation with one hand, using the other to struggle with the creature which continued to circle in determination around his waist. The robbers started laughing, and more lights came on around the square. At last Wakeman had the buttons undone; then he unbuckled the overcoat's belt, which was preventing the thing from climbing any higher. Finally the garment was open and the creature jumped of its own accord to the pavement. It was the squirrel. It must have mistaken him for a tree. It ran off a ways, then stopped to get its bearings. Then it shot across the pavement, back into the park, and up a real tree.

Wakeman's overcoat was dangling from one shoulder. His legs got tangled up in it and quickly he was down on the pavement, cursing. The men in the park were laughing uproariously. Wakeman heard something jangle on the pavement, and then his wallet and keys slid across the pavement toward him.

"After this, we wouldn't want you to have to stay

outside all night," laughed one of the men.

Wakeman was so disgusted he lay down on the wet pavement. The men walked away, continuing to laugh.

He continued to lay there on the wet pavement. Losing the novel and his billfold was bad enough, but the coincidence of the squirrel left him in a black mood indeed. It reminded him of stories he had heard of workmen being killed by falling commodes, or musicians injured by pianos imploding under the pressure of their own strings. To be on the wrong end of adversity was one thing, but to be simultaneously the victim of cosmic slapstick was too much for one's sanity.

At length the wetness of the pavement began to penetrate his clothes. Funny how material imperatives negate even the extremes of spiritual states, thought Wakeman. He had to get up, had to move. Though he was tempted to just leave them, and surrender himself to adversity, he collected his keys and overcoat, then trudged slowly to the edge of the plaza and entered Plaza Station South. A car was just pulling off. To hell with it, he thought. He would just walk home. He left the station and walked to the stone railing that bordered the plaza on this side and looked down at Berkeley Avenue. Then he descended the steps he'd ascended the night before, the night he'd fought Wharton and met Arget.

Soon he was walking across the Berkeley Avenue bridge on his way home. Thick white fog had settled down over the river. The river and most of the bridge were invisible.

Far ahead, the fog parted a bit and he could see a human form. It was a man, and he was looking over the rail at the river. Then the fog interposed itself and Wakeman lost sight of the man. He started running. "Wait," he yelled. Then the man was right in front of him, straddling the rail. He was looking at Wakeman with big brown eyes. *Daniel Eidle*. "What. . ." began Wakeman. But the young man shook his head, whispered something unintelligible, and swung his other leg over the rail. Wakeman made a lunge, grabbing: but it was too late. He grasped only air. Seconds later, he heard a splash. He looked over the rail. There was a hole in the fog, made as if by the suicidal plunge. Wakeman could see the wave in the river that spread out in a circle from the man's entry point. The Circle, Wakeman thought. Symbol of the Absolute. . . .

Then he felt a hand on his shoulder. He whirled around. A old man stood there. He was tall, and wearing a large floppy hat, like that of some kind of prelate, and a long overcoat. He wore an elaborate handlebar mustache, attached like a live thing to his upper lip.

"McX!" said Wakeman. "What are you doing here?"

"You were thinking of jumping. You are young yet, and have much more to do."

"Well, I don't know what you're talking about," Wakeman laughed, "but what else is new? You certainly have a talent for showing up unexpectedly. But I had no intention of committing suicide. Someone just jumped, and I was watching to see if he would resurface. . . ." Wakeman trailed off, wandering what was amiss, then he had it: he was in the midst of yet another coincidence. "The man who just jumped was Daniel Eidle, the young man in the mental ward, that you fought with over that book! What a coincidence that we should all meet here again on this bridge!"

"What does it mean, do you think?" replied the old man.

"Why are you always asking me that?" laughed Wakeman. "It doesn't mean anything, it's just a coincidence."

"Are you sure?"

Then he remembered the squirrel in the park. "Well, I don't know. I think I see what you're getting at, though I don't know why you're getting at it. I just had a coincidence, just before this one, as a matter of fact, that seemed something like that one in the mental ward, when the doctors were all lined up behind me--you know.

It was so absurd that it seemed to mean something. . . ."

"Do you feel you are at the center of a momentous event?" said McX, his thin old face darting forward.

"Well, in fact I do. But how could I avoid feeling that way? After all, two nights ago I awoke in the Crystal Palace without memory of going there. Then I found out that this novel, that I could have sworn I'd begun myself, was already published. . . . I could go on. It all does seem to mean *something*. What, I've no idea. But why do you ask?"

McX's face broke into a smile. "I'll level with you, Mr. Wakeman, and I'll tell you why. You are a man of obvious intelligence. A professor at the University, no? You are adept at interpretation, then, and will have no trouble following my meaning, which may be hidden behind my words! But the very faculty, with which you interpret the complex, impairs you. In my years of practice, I've noticed a correlation between intelligence and mental illness. The stupid are deluded religiously--they think they are God maybe. Those with average intelligence become obsessed with political intrigue. But the most intelligent imagine themselves in a complex interaction with cosmic phenomena--things like coincidence. They are the doctors, the scientists, the intellectuals--and one fine morning: poof! They wake up in a universe of signi-

fications. The very fabric and arrangement of reality comments subtly yet profoundly on their every move. They suffer from a certain flatulence of the interpretive faculty."

"But wait a minute," replied Wakeman, who had reeled back in astonishment. "On the one hand you keep inviting me to interpret, and on the other you tell me that my interpretation is lunacy."

"So I contradict myself?" said McX with raised eyebrows. "Is that so dissonant with the spirit of the age? Let me tell you, my dear fellow, that I sympathize deeply with you. One consequence--some might well deem it an advantage--of living in excess of two millenia is that one gets to experience different sides of many issues. I have not always been physician to the insane: much of my life I have spent as *insane*! How many years have I lived with an ethereal choir installed in my otic passages, competing for my attention with an overly reverberated voice whispering nonsense! How many years--no, centuries--have I spent looking over my shoulder at pale beams of sunlight falling suspiciously over objects in my study, at the arrangement of furniture, buildings, of people in crowds, and wonder why things are one way instead of another and--as they were that way--what they meant and who intended them so? How many times have I--believe it or

not--been in your station in that mental ward, incarcerated in some miserable cell in that very hospital, cast aside, poked with needles and surfeited with chemicals simply because I was insane! It has happened to me many times over the centuries. For a while, they were always throwing me into such places. I am fortunate enough to count among my many lush experiences an interval, even, in the legendary eighteenth century Bedlam. Curious that the barbarity of such places has scarcely diminished over the ages! How bizarre is treatment of the insane! In olden days we were thought to be seers, to enjoy rapport with the divine! Believe me, the sympathy I express for your predicament comes from one who has seen both sides of sanity, who has been both sane and insane, sometimes simultaneously! That is the curse of the brilliant: to be insane and not able to enjoy it, simply because we are too intelligent to deny our own insanity!"

Wakeman shook his head. "But I don't feel insane. I've just . . . awakened, somehow."

"Yet you are young and new to insanity. Your sensation of awakening may be just the first tingles of an incipient lunacy."

Wakeman stiffened. "How can we be standing talking like this when a man has just jumped off the bridge?"

"It must be symbolic of the way in which philosophi-

cal concerns are removed from the realities of life," laughed McX. "Don't worry any more about it. What you think was a monstrous coincidence was only half so. The young man and I came here together. He is helping me with research into the psychology of bridge jumpers and their putative saviours."

"But that water is cold! He'll die of exposure!"

"He was wearing a wetsuit."

Now the old doctor was looking severely at Wakeman. Everything got very quiet for a while. McX's pseudo-clerical get-up wafted in and out of the fog. Then he broke the spell by laughing and reaching into his coat pocket. He pulled out a card and gave it to Wakeman, who barely glanced at the card and dropped it absently into his pocket.

"I may be of use to you in the future," said the old man. "But right now, I really must continue my experiment."

Wakeman watched the old man walking away, his form seeming to dissolve into the fog as if it and he were of the same element. Then Wakeman heard him laughing, heard him saying, his voice disembodied by the fog, "Enjoy your life! Never forget the great scheme of things and your essential part in it!"

It then occurred to Wakeman that he had several more

questions to ask the old doctor. One would be why McX had abandoned him in the Crystal Palace. But it was too late. McX had disappeared into the fog. What a strange, portentous creature he was, thought Wakeman. Then it occurred to Wakeman to look at the card McX had given him. He reached into his coat pocket and grasped what he at first thought was the card. But no, it was too thick. He pulled the object out and looked at it. It was a section of the book he'd placed there only an hour or so before.

The Circular Gardens.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wakeman probably wouldn't have gone up to Wharton's office if it hadn't been for yet another series of coincidences. That morning before class Wakeman had stopped in the mailroom. Among the other faculty in the room was Wharton, who was reading a letter while standing in front of his box. To Wakeman's disgust, he was blocking Wakeman's access to his own box. It infuriated Wakeman that he should have to acknowledge Wharton's presence by asking him to move. He almost stalked out of the mailroom without checking his box, but he didn't want Wharton to know that there had been another simultaneity and that he, Wakeman, was bothered by it. So he gritted his teeth and muttered "excuse me" and reached into his box when Wharton had moved.

That was bad enough but then there was the matter of leaving the mailroom. He and Wharton were standing near one another, next to the door. Wakeman was afraid that they would both begin to move to the door at the same time, so he waited for Wharton to leave first, pretending to be preoccupied with his mail. Yet the man refused to budge. Finally, Wakeman, exasperated, moved to the door. And just as he had imagined it, so did Wharton, who then stepped back, as if courteously, to allow Wakeman to pass.

Wakeman by this time was nearing fury. The day was starting off badly, and he had a full schedule, including a class in less than an hour. Sometime soon he needed to get the latest fragment to Gabriel. He had had little rest, again, the night before, and it would be necessary to pace himself today, to keep himself under tight control. Passing Wharton, he gathered his emotions, resolving to forget this last series of absurdities.

Yet simultaneity had not had enough of him. Several minutes later Wakeman walked upstairs to the departmental secretary's office. Just as he came out of the stairwell he noted Wharton coming down the hall, evidently destined for the same office. This was bad enough--but then, in the space between him and Wharton, two professors, each with stacks of papers in their hands, rushed out of two separate, though neighboring doorways, at the exact same instant, and collided. "Excuse me," one of them gasped. "Sorry, Jack," said the other, bending down to collect the papers he'd knocked out of his colleague's hand.

Wakeman's face grew puffy and red with rage as he walked on down the hall, abandoning his plans for entering the departmental office, and picking his way around the two kneeling professors. As he passed, he stole a quick glance at Wharton. It was just as he supposed. He could see that Wharton was trying to be stone-faced, trying not

to show the hatred for him--Wakeman--that had welled up in the face of the most recent coincidence. The coincidence could not have been more effective even if someone had been engineering it. True, it would have been more immediately infuriating if he and Wharton had collided. But this coincidence was of the type that had staying power, simply because it provided more food for rumination. Indeed, what was maddening was that it carried symbolic value to it. The situation was something like, for example, that of a man and woman with sexual difficulties who feared to speak to the other of those difficulties, watching a television show about a couple with identical problems. It brought out the unspoken. And it could not have come at a worse time, occurring as it did after the fistfight on the plaza. It was atrocious. It was cosmic bad taste. Wakeman imagined that Wharton and himself had by accident tumbled into the same pit of metaphysical quicksand, and sank lower and lower, hating each other more with every passing instant.

Blind with rage, Wakeman returned to his office, slammed the door, and paced back and forth furiously for a few moments. Then he jerked open the door again and stepped out into the hall. He had decided to have it out with Wharton, then and there.

Wharton's door was open. Wharton was talking to a

student. Wakeman barged into the room. The discussion stopped. Wharton looked up at Wakeman, his face red with embarrassment and anger.

"Excuse us a minute, please," Wakeman said to the student.

Startled, the student glanced at Wharton, got up and left. Wakeman shut the door after him, and walked up to Wharton's desk.

Wharton looked up from behind the desk. "What's the meaning of this?" he blustered.

"I believe that question might be more appropriate coming from me than you, considering the little episode night before last," said Wakeman. "But before we get into that, how long did that sucker-punch put you out?"

"It didn't put me out! I waited till you walked off, and left. I was just drunk, or I'd" Wharton's face became even redder. He pushed his chair back from the desk, but didn't get up. "You mean to tell me you barge to my office and without ceremony order my student out just to talk about . . . that?"

"Look, you son-of-a-bitch, don't try to muddle things." Wakeman replied. "I know why I'm here."

"Why, then, are you here?" replied Wharton, smacking the surface of his desk with both palms. A paper floated to the floor.

Wakeman started to reply, but then it hit him that he had no more knowledge of why he was there than Wharton. What was he going to do, start talking to Elliot about coincidence? An unthinkable compromise with simultaneity! Confront Wharton with the matter of the appearance of his doppelganger, which had risen from the same spot he'd felled Wharton? That was out too: Wakeman could just see the satisfaction on Wharton's face as he watched him, Wakeman, in the process of apparent psychological decompensation. Wharton would no doubt gloat that Wakeman had been the first one to break under the absurd tensions of coincidence. In desperation, Wakeman thought for a minute of warning Wharton away from Roberta. But that too was impossible: Roberta would not brook interference in her personal life. Why hadn't he thought this through?

"You know why," Wakeman repeated, his voice cracking now in nervousness. In desperation, he decided to hint at the doppelganger issue. "Look, where did you get that mask, that Wakeman mask you wore night before last?"

"Whaaat?"

Wakeman was trembling with rage and uncertainty. "You kn-know wh-what I'm talking about," he stuttered.

"I have no idea what you're talking about or why you're here, and I think you'd better explain yourself--or even better, leave--before I pick up this phone and call

campus security," Wharton said.

Wakeman scoured his mind for the most practical method of face-saving. He could think of nothing. He started to sputter. "Look, I never liked you in the first place, and I like you less now that . . . that" He trailed off, cringing at the fact that he had almost blurted out something about coincidence. His vision swam with confusion and humiliation.

Wharton's face was a mask of disbelief. He himself sputtered incoherently a while, then managed weakly, "Well, what do you want me to do about it?"

The full absurdity of the situation was upon Wakeman. What *did* he want Wharton to do about it? He heard a giggle escape him, and he knew he had to get out of there fast. "Look, goddamn it," he blustered. "See here now, Wharton" He couldn't continue. He gestured wordlessly. Wharton arose slowly behind his desk as Wakeman backed away, an incredulous expression on his face. Maddened, Wakeman flung the door open and fled into the hall. He pushed the waiting student out of his way. As he turned a corner down the hall, he looked back. Wharton and the student were both standing at the door, staring after him with open mouths.

The class had turned out to be excruciating. Wakeman

was getting one of his almost incapacitating headaches as a result of several days of disorientation, lack of sleep, tension, and alcohol consumption. This morning his students had been annoyingly inquisitive and argumentative. Finally he could take no more. In place of further discussion, he decided to have the students read their most recent papers to one another. One bright young man volunteered immediately.

The paper was written on a novel about sexual politics. The student began:

"Most of the criticism of this novel has argued that it seeks to convey its version of male/female conflict in an identifiable *product*, that is a work of art. But a closer examination of the novel reveals that the very language, even the punctuation and other lexical devices, that the author employs to construct such a product, effects its deconstruction, and exposes the novel to be not product, but process. Not art, but a flow of language.

"Take for example the use of the semicolon in the first sentence of the book. Now, the semicolon is quite rightly associated and contrasted unfavorably with the colon. Yet the *semicolon*, in other words, a mere partial and less than ideal colon, is clearly the male of the two punctuations: look at the obvious phallic image of the

lower of the mark's two parts. The very use here of the semicolon, then, undermines the author's assertion that the male is the dominant and superior sex. Moreover, the organ is clearly flaccid, implying impotence. Contrast this with the use of the colon (symbolizing the two female breasts?) in the second sentence in reference to the female and notice the images of strength it provides.

"Thus we are shown at the very beginning of the novel that that the message to us will be mixed. On one level, the intended one, the male is clearly valorized. But on another level, the unintended one, the implied one, the male is left looking impotent and weak, undermining the novel's message of male creativity and power.

"Such a mixed message clearly problematizes the novel's pretense at being a product, a thing of completeness: for the reader it is rather a process, in which he always is standing in an instant, before a word, a punctuation mark, constantly trying, instant by instant, to reconcile the intended layer with the unintended and undermining layer. . . ."

Product. . . . Process, thought Wakeman. Such a dichotomy might also be applied to life. The instants of one's life kept accumulating, they seemed sometimes about to form patterns that made sense of their accumulation . . . but then the patterns never quite

resolved into an identifiable . . . *product*. One was always left standing, isolated in the instant, a flux of inchoate patterns whirling around. Patterns of nothingness, perhaps. And yet life never spun off completely into chaos; there seemed to be a unifying principle in it somewhat like there was in texts: *The Circular Gardens*, for instance, could not follow Inman through his stupefying labyrinth in one fragment and take up the sex life of Venusian toads the next. Similarly, his ten or twelve students could not be young men and women one instant and a swarm of grotesque, giant grasshoppers the next. But what was this unifying principle that determined that one minute should be a near facsimile to the next? Could it be that it was the very walls of the Product one inhabited but was always unable to get a clear picture of? Or was it merely another incomplete pattern flitting around in the murk, a cohesiveness existing for no apparent reason yet producing thickets of relatable instants?

A student, as if from afar and as if speaking in a tiny, hollow voice, had said something to him. The whole class was looking at him in various mixtures of amusement and embarrassment. How long had he been dreaming off? Then his vision blurred and for a second he was presiding over a class of giant, preening, chattering grasshoppers.

At that point, Wakeman looked down and beheld a

large, wiry pubic hair that had for some reason become lodged in his textbook. Where the hell had that come from, he thought. It wasn't his color. He had picked it up and was about to dangle it out in front of him, like a Bodddhisatva with a flower, in answer to the student's question. He remembered where he was just in time. After that he couldn't recover his train of thought, so he dismissed class.

Wakeman spent much of the rest of the day in his office, grading papers and trying to avoid Wharton. His headache and state of mind caused him to cancel, for the second time that week, his second class. He phoned Gabriel at his headquarters in Mount Immanuel several times to tell him about the newest fragment, but got no answer.

Obviously he had botched things with Wharton. What had he been trying to accomplish by going to the man's office? He supposed that the appearance of the *dopple-ganger* the night before had had something to do with it. But more than anything, he had to admit, he had been possessed by an unreasoning state of mind. His obsession with coincidence, which he had held in check all these years, never mentioning it except to joke about it, seemed to be pressing him for outlet. He felt on the verge of an awakening. This *satori*, however, was so ill-defined that

he could not place it within a single conceptual block. On the one hand, all around him were powerful signs: the sleepwalking incident, the novel he seemed to have begun but which had turned up published by a man whose name was identical to his own pen name, the hallucinations, and above all, the *doppleganger*. But on the other was this creeping disgust, this new awareness that nothing had a cause, that nothing had meaning or eventual end in *product*. It was all *process*. He knew that these two attitudes were mutually exclusive, but he had them nevertheless.

He wanted to merely chalk up the signs to the Festival, this annual mass hysteria, and wait for them to disappear in due course. And of course he might really be mentally ill. What had McX said? *A universe of significations*. . . . But the temptation was too great: in spite of his dubious mental state he felt he must investigate at least some of the signs, try to see where they lead to. He was not yet ready to give up old ways of thinking in favor of the new one just acquired in the class. Of course, he was already looking into the strange business of the novel, simply in the course of helping Gabriel with the film. The fragment of *The Circular Gardens* he held in his pocket was the latest foray into that field. But what really raised his hackles was this newest and most power-

ful sign: the appearance of the *doppleganger* Tuesday night on the square. There had been no ambiguity of light that would explain it, and it was simply too clear to have been a hallucination. It had been like looking into a mirror. So what was the explanation? Had he a twin brother? The possibility certainly existed. He had been adopted as an infant. Had his biological mother given birth to twins? Of course he had never had any sign, until seeing the *doppleganger*, that she had. His adoptive parents had certainly never told him anything about either his biological parents or a possible twin. And if they had ever intended to, they waited to late, for when he ten they were killed in an auto wreck. They had turned out to be nearly destitute, and they were estranged from the few remote relatives they had. He had been raised in an orphanage in Bonneville, and had remained in the city the rest of his life. He had never gone back to his native village of Key.

He resolved to check into national census records. That would be easy enough to do via computer. And if that didn't yield anything conclusive, he would take a trip in the near future to his ancestral home-place. It was only an hour's drive or so. Perhaps a woman, his neighbor as a child, and the only resident of Key he could remember, still lived there. She had been quite friendly with his

mother. Perhaps she might yield some information, might tell him of a twin.

Late in the afternoon Roberta called, inviting him over for supper.

He decided to walk to her house instead of taking the train. The afternoon was warm and sunny, and it was not a lengthy walk.

It came on unexpectedly, like an accident. Wakeman was walking through a busy, thriving district of upscale cafes, boutiques and office buildings when it hit. With it seemed to come a great number of new sounds and sights.

Wakeman had always thought of the city as a monolith, a product. It had certain limits, it had a government, it had buildings that one saw day after day, the Crystal Palace, the Metropolitan Museum, St. Superflua's, City Hall, the immense towers in the commercial district. Between the City Hall and the Museum there was the park. And of course there was the circular track system that Wakeman imagined not as trains and passengers but as a map.

Yet he had been wrong: the city was process. It was here, on the ground and all around him. He lost track of his whereabouts, so immersed was he in his new conception. It seemed to Wakeman that he was a splinter in the flesh

of time, working his way slowly in through the layers of skin and muscle and fat. The city was Sheffield's, now it was Madigan's, now it was the man in the telephone booth gesturing and talking. It was the traffic, spewing forth fumes, and the intersections. The city was in the crowds that flooded the sidewalks in incomprehensible waves. The city was the crazy network of near and possible collisions between things, between the autos on the streets, between the myriad pedestrians who sprang up in his vision one instant, jostled their way around him the next, abandoned him the next. The city was not complete. Here a shop was refurbishing its facade. In the next block hammers clanged and saws screeched in a constuction site. In the next was a blackened old building that had recently burned.

Wakeman suddenly reaized that he had been in a sort of trance, and that he had wandered from the prosperous sector into one of considerable decay. The crowds and buildings here was sparser, but were less pleasant to look at. Wakeman passed under a window from which a woman was idly leaning. In a filthy doorway down the street a man with an immense stomach stood, the stomach pooching out over the steps. As Wakeman approached, the stomach disappeared behind a door. A group of several young children playing in the street stopped to watch him pass. An auto

started its engine nearby; the engine sagged into stillness then chugged back to life, only to stop again.

Wakeman walked by a corner on which stood several prostitutes. One of them approached him and darted her heavily rouged face up to his and grinned. "Hey," she said, grinning and popping chewing gum in her mouth. Wakeman caught the scent of chewing gum, of cologne, and auto exhaust and garbage all mixed up together. He resisted the urge to vomit and hurried around the prostitutes. One of them called something after him that he could not make out, but it made him move away faster. To get away from the prostitutes he entered an even more dilapidated section of the city. Here glass and garbage was strewn around, and some of the windows were broken. Ahead, two dogs copulated in the street and several children looked on in fascination. Just to Wakeman's side a door flung open and a man came running into the street, nearly colliding with Wakeman. He had a huge goiter that jiggled from his neck as he ran. Another man came running after him, shouting something. Then the two were fighting in the street.

Wakeman hurried to the end of the street where he saw a streetcar track. Luckily, the car was just approaching. It stopped and Wakeman got on and dropped several coins in the fare box. He was relieved. He was safe from the

city, he thought, this grotesque, decaying process--the word *city* hardly seemed to apply anymore.

Yet Wakeman's sensation of uncontrolled, unmotivated process did not disappear as it should have after he entered the streetcar. Near him stood a small boy, who, snapping his fingers, leaned over and said in a clear soprano, "It happens, just like that." What did that mean, thought Wakeman. Nothing! It meant nothing! It was just one more surplus occurrence in the vast, unfathomable, changing city.

Wakeman looked back at the boy, who was still staring at him, smiling. The smile scarcely broke the pallid smoothness of the flawless skin. The boy's mother sat nearby, a slim woman in a black overcoat, looking out the window.

The streetcar had reached Berkeley Avenue, where it turned. In a perfectly synchronized movement, the boy reached out and grasped a pole and leaned away in the direction the car, until that point, had been taking. It occurred to Wakeman that everyone and everything in the car leaned in a similar fashion, in the same direction. In fact, all over the city people were in the act of leaning against the force of inertia. Wakeman shivered at the thought. He imagined the whole city to be engaged in a synchronous pantomime without meaning. The dull hue of

uniformity bubbled out of the ditches and manholes and splashed up on the city.

One by one, Wakeman surveyed his fellow passengers. All of them had histories. Great bulges of cause and effect were backed up behind their presence on the inconsequential streetcar. To get his mind off the city, Wakeman started to imagine their lives. He began with the young, stout man sitting several seats in front of him. Wakeman noted he had seen him many times on the public conveyances. This irritated Wakeman. He wanted to ask the young man if he spent his entire existence on the car. But then Wakeman realized what it was that really bothered him. It was that the young man never rode the streetcar, except when he--Wakeman--did! That was his entire existence. He had no inner life. He was an automaton, wound up and set down to wander aimlessly the planet where he had happened for no reason on the *raison d'etre* of being on the car when Wakeman was. Wakeman felt a surge of blind fury and turned his attention to the other passengers. But by that time, his first impression had vanished and it seemed their lives were all as absurdly unmovitated as the young man's. They had no past, no future, and no reason for being there.

Wakeman started having the impression that the streetcar slid like a surgical probe through time. Time

was dense. Ahead, it split open to receive the streetcar. To the rear, it closed behind the vehicle in a flurry of instants. Wakeman looked out at an area of shops. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the boy step in his direction.

All that exists is the moment. This moment, Parisi's, and a businessman turns a page of a newspaper. This instant, Morehead's, and the boy leans at a forty-five degree angle from the pole. This instant, a bar, its red door, recessed into a corridor, opening; a black interior, a chalk-white face looking out. The boy looking closely at Wakeman, daring him. The mother stiffens, alert now, looks hard at the boy. A woman with packages shifts about, glances at Wakeman. The businessman folds his newspaper. A muscle in the young man's jaw twitches convulsively: he thinks his only thought: "I am on the streetcar with Wakeman." The driver takes several short glances in the rear-view mirror, smiles. In a phone booth on a corner a man turns to watch the streetcar pass. The boy now moves in Wakeman's direction, hoisting himself up, hands on seat-backs on either side of the aisle, propelling himself feet first, stopping in front of Wakeman, smiling, the smile suggesting complicity. But with what? What? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! No rhyme or reason or final end to any of it!

"Madam," said Wakeman. "Would you mind making your child sit down?"

"What's the matter, mister," said the child's mother. "Don't like kids or something?"

"I like them fine," replied Wakeman, "except for that one." He could stand no more. He rose and moved up the aisle. "Let me out here, please," he said to the conductor.

The car slowed and Wakeman stepped to the ground, still blocks away from Roberta's. He started up a steep incline. Twilight was coming on now, the wind was blowing, and rain clouds were rolling in. When Wakeman reached the top of the hill, he stopped and looked out over the city. From here, it was mercifully hard and complete. In the near distance, he could see St. Superflua's. Its bulk looked like a beast in repose on a lawn of lights. Much further, the white-columned facade of Fourier's mansion hung as if suspended in an invisible rigging. Normally, the mansion could not be seen this time of day. This evening was the first time Wakeman had seen it lighted.

"It's just that he's always where I am or want to be," said Wakeman. "I can't turn around without running into him."

She laughed, of oourse. They always laugh when you tell them about being victimized by coincidence, thought Wakeman. And when they see you're serious, they try to look blank, but you know they think you're crazy. Only Roberta didn't mind telling him he was crazy when he told her about his confrontation with Wharton and the reason for it.

"You're disintegrating, and rapidly," she said.

"What ever possessed you to do such a thing?"

"Now that I have the time to think about it, I don't know," Wakeman replied, pacing back and forth in Roberta's living room. Supper was long over and the couple had been relaxing with drinks when he broached the subject. "It was an awful display of weakness in front of an adversary. Now he has one up on me. His whole attitude was a denial of our coincidences. Now he can let on that I'm a mere neurotic. . . ."

Roberta turned from the stereo, from which a soft jazz number was emanating. "I don't understand you. That's not what I was talking about at all. What I meant to say is that you cannot treat people like that. You have an obligation to keep some things hidden."

Wakeman thought a minute. "You're right. Wharton could still report me. He could also start rumours around the University about my sanity. In days I might be the

object of strange looks, avoidances. . . ."

Roberta had turned back to the stereo. She made a gesture of despair with one hand while inserting a disk into its sleeve with the other. "You keep misunderstanding. I see now that you're . . . way out there. The point is that you can't impose your private neuroses on people. Frankly, I don't understand what you could have against him. You know, you're a lot alike. You're both forty, you're both tall and dark. . . ."

He had put up a hand. "Stop. Stop, please. That's just what I don't want to hear."

"Oh," said Roberta. "I get it. More coincidence."

"It sounds like I'm nuts, doesn't it?"

"Well, yes." She turned. "I've been meaning to speak to you about this psychiatric . . . interlude you had, Thomas. Wasn't there more to it than what you've been telling me?"

"I haven't had a psychiatric interlude. I just got tangled up there on my way home from the ball!"

"Well, I just don't understand this obsession of yours with coincidence. It's just a fact of everyday life. I know Peter likes to go to that new bar over in the Old City--what's the name? The Bishop Berkeley or something like that. A lot of people from the University go there. He was just on his way home when you met. If

you walked over the Berkeley Avenue bridge, there was a multitude of spots where you could have met. You just happened to run into one another--I'm not trying to be facetious--when you did. He left the bar at a certain time, you left your apartment at a certain time: it's just cause and effect, that's all."

For some reason Wakeman had always resented coincidence being swept away by the cause and effect explanation. "No, that's not all. It's not that explainable. There's a quadrillion to one chance against any two things happening at one time, not to mention three, four or a million things." He knitted his brow in thought and, after a pause, continued as if to himself, "Why then, does anything happen?"

"If your metaphysics ran the universe, we'd all be frozen. Existence would be a still life."

She had something there. "That would cut down on the absurdity of all this coinciding movement, certainly," Wakeman said.

"Thomas, you just have to accept certain things in life," Rita said, visibly trying to control her laughter. "You can't go around in rebellion all the time. You should know that by now. Perhaps you should read the existentialists."

Suddenly, Wakeman saw that she was right, and that he

had been living and thinking so long in a certain way that he thought it was natural.

He sat down next to her on the sofa. "A part of me sees what you mean," he replied. "But another part refuses to accept the possibility of compromise with things. People have the right to demand that things add up. Life shouldn't just be a meaningless sequence, a one, two, three kind of thing. It should be more like a one plus two equals three arrangement, something you can build on. A *product*, not just a *process*. Moreover, I'm well acquainted with the existentialists. The heroes of their novels think a lot like me."

"But life's not that way, something that you can always add up the parts of and get the whole. . . ."

My whole point, thought Wakeman. She would never understand. He hardly understood himself. Better to be less abstract.

A few minutes later she said, "What's wrong? Too much on your mind?"

He couldn't tell her that it was because, while making love to her, he had seen a dry, brown patch of skin on her neck. It wasn't that it was brown and dry, either; it was just that it was *there*. He took his arms from her and sat back, looking at her with a mixture of regret and revulsion. What was this creature that *settled* in space

next to him?

She sat up, rearranged her clothing. "It's all right, I didn't really feel like it anyway. I've got things on my mind, too."

"Such as?"

"Oh, getting old, things like that. I'll be forty next month. I don't think I'm as pretty as I once was."

He felt a sudden wave of affection for this slightly inept woman. "But you are. And what does physical appearance amount to, anyway," he said, feeling suddenly that she needed, like an unattractive youngster, to be reassured. "Physical features are just external appurtenances. Beneath the exterior is you, a beautiful, independent. . . ."

He stopped suddenly, paralyzed by the knowledge that what he was saying was a lie. There was no one beneath this exterior, just an inchoate mass of memories, expectations, and drives spread out through time, all united under a word--no, a sound: R o b e r t a. But allowing even this much of an interior, Wakeman saw, was a lie. This was because time was a lie. All that was, was the moment, the instant, in which R o b e r t a--no, this . . . wordless entity, stretched itself, emitted a cloud of smoke, and pursed its lips, actions all performed in an infinite series of tiny accretions called

"movements": of elastic tissues, fluids, molecules which stringed along this way, then that, accompanied by a sound, a series of vibrations, that seemed to have their origin deep within. . . .

"I said you can spend the night if you want. . . ."

"Actually, I'm very tired," he said after a pause.

"And I've got so much to do, with this business with Gabriel."

"All right. I understand," she said.

They rose and she walked him to the door. He stopped a minute. His vision had settled, without him intending it, on the patch of dry, brown skin. It was not on her; there was nothing for it to be on: she was the brown patch of skin. . . .

"Good night, Roberta," he said.

He had had to force himself to say the name. Now, as he walked down the street toward the street car stop, it echoed in his skull: R o b e r t a

If a person could be a product, thought Wakeman, Diana was a product. He remembered the impression of unity and completeness that had so struck him at their last meeting. He could not imagine her getting old, her skin wrinkling, her body sagging. Moreover, he could not imagine her having sex with Gabriel. Yet that perhaps was

what was about to happen.

After leaving Roberta's Wakeman had felt restless. Moreover, he wanted to deliver the latest novel fragment to Gabriel, whom he had been unable to reach during the day. So instead of disembarking the train that had brought him from Roberta's and walking home from the Crystal Palace, Wakeman had entered the Circle Six train and ridden it to Mount Immanuel. From the station he had walked up the incline toward Gabriel's residence. He had not gotten far when he saw Gabriel and Diana walking slowly ahead of him, their arms encircling each other's waist. The chagrin that welled up within Wakeman surprised him: he had not been aware of having become so attracted to Diana that he could be jealous of her. Yet he found himself slowing his pace and following the pair silently, a dull ache in his breast. He found himself hoping that Diana would separate from Gabriel at the next intersection and keep walking toward her own home further up the mountain. Yet when the two reached the intersection the young woman turned into it with Gabriel, who leaned down and kissed her on the lips.

From then on it had been a horror. Wakeman could not believe himself. He had found himself continuing to follow the pair, lurking in the shadowed doorways of abandoned buildings, hanging far behind as Gabriel and

Diana walked onward through the ruined, moonlit quarter, disappearing occasionally in the winding street. He could not believe that he had finally approached Gabriel's house and stationed himself in the yard of the house across the street, hiding himself behind a tree. And he could not believe that he had taken up watch there, hoping that the girl would come out of the building and start home, hoping that the light in Gabriel's living room would not go out.

An hour had passed, then the light did go out. But Diana had not come out, and another light, this one no doubt in Gabriel's bedroom, had come on.

Wakeman lay back on the lawn, feeling the soft, moist grass under him, and looked up at the bright moon. It was then that the tremor came. The ground started swaying, and somewhere in the neighborhood, rubble was collapsing. Wakeman did not wait for the tremor to subside before jumping to his feet and running down the hill toward the transit station.

CHAPTER NINE

"This just in: Channel Six News has learned that a truce has been arranged in Westonia between forces of the attempted coup and the government. Prime Minister Thornpole has announced the dissolution of Parliament and new elections scheduled for early next week. In exchange the coup forces are to withdraw from Parliament building and the main part of Westonia immediately.

"In a speech aired just minutes ago on Westonia television, The Prime Minister expressed regret that democratic government was being forced to compromise with a military insurgency. But in view of the approach of Pacelli's Comet, and the evident sincerity of the coup leaders that their sole purpose is the destruction of the comet, before it, in turn, destroys earth, Thornpole has expressed his willingness to let the people decide.

"There is still much unwillingness to take any action toward the comet on the part of the military, the Parliament, or the environmental science community. Carl Burke, the discoverer of the comet's abrupt course change, has been quoted as saying a nuclear strike toward the comet is unnecessary and may harm the planet's upper atmosphere.

"Yet coup leaders apparently think that if given the opportunity, voters will see it their way, especially as

they have been joined by Robert McKenzie, the immensely popular war hero and Westonia M.P. McKenzie now heads the civilian opposition that has sprung up in favor of a nuclear strike against the comet. We turn now to Allen Jenderswarm, our political analyst. Allen, what chance does McKenzie have of rallying the nation to his cause?"

"It's hard to say at this juncture, Milt. But McKenzie is perhaps the most popular politician to come along in the last two decades. He was expected to head the opposition at the next election anyway, so this is not a step he is taking without political foundation. The coup generals have indeed effected quite a coup in attracting McKenzie to their side."

"Do you think that he might be guilty of a little opportunism here?"

"I don't think so, Milt. This is a man of unquestioned integrity everywhere in government, all across the nation. No doubt he has been genuinely persuaded by those who favor action against the comet. He is said to be a recent convert to that new cult we keep hearing about, the Saints of the Last Day."

"Right. We're going to have an interview tomorrow with someone who can tell us all about this cult. But quickly, give us your best estimate of public sympathy with the cult and with the nuclear strike."

"That too is hard to say, Milt. But voters are not usually given to way-out political or scientific views, and they're certainly repelled by such mysticism as that of the cult. I'll have to tell you, I don't find much credence given to this idea of danger from that comet. If McKenzie was not at their lead, I'd say they would have absolutely no chance of winning. But since he has joined them, I'd say their chances at the poles are fifty-fifty, perhaps better. McKenzie may be the only man on the planet that could lead this strange opposition, this mixture of mystics and generals, to victory."

"Fifty-fifty? That's pretty good. Well, I'm sure we'll hear more about this in the next few days."

"Indeed, hours, Milt. The election is only two days away. I have it from reliable sources that McKenzie intends to campaign in Bonneville the very day of the election."

"And that's Sunday, isn't it?"

"Right. For this special, some might say emergency, election, the poles will be open only in the afternoon that day."

"Well, thanks, Allen. We now turn to the earthquake that shook the city about midnight last night. Estimates are that damage was minimal, most of it occurring in Mount Immanuel, which, of course, was the hardest hit of all the

city's quarters during the large quake two years ago. We are pleased that the damage was so light that we can bring you in good conscience some more light hearted news growing out of the quake. We now turn to Clarissa Farmreason, who is standing by on the slopes of Mount Immanuel. Clarissa, what can you tell us about this strange new development?"

"Milt, it seems that the tremor last night dislodged a large boulder, which rolled a ways down the mountain and came to rest against some other boulders in such a way that a huge face was created on the side of the mountain. I know the camera doesn't show it very well, but in person it's quite striking. There are clearly two hollow eyes--probably from where boulders have been dislodged--a huge nose, and a mouth."

"From here that mouth looks like it's set in a kind of depraved leer, Clarissa."

"Well, some might say so, Milt. Perhaps Dionysian is a better adjective. But whatever the description, this new geological phenomenon has been attracting quite a crowd of spectators, especially to Mount Immanuel, though it can be seen all over one side of the city. Let me ask a spectator here what she thinks about it. Madam, what does this huge, somber face mean to Bonneville?"

"Clarissa, I don't know what it means, but I do think

it was always there. We just couldn't see it until that boulder rolled into just the right place."

"Well, thanks. That's all from Mount Immanuel, Milt. Back to you."

Wakeman flicked off the television and stood looking around his new apartment. He felt refreshed. He had actually slept the night before, in spite of what he had found in his apartment.

After the tremor, he had gone home and found the apartment ransacked. Surprisingly, his valuables were untouched. What had they wanted? He found the answer in the alcove in which he kept his computer. The robbers had taken nothing but his computer disks. When he switched on his computer, he found that his hard drive had been wiped clean.

The unavoidable conclusion, especially after being robbed of the novel Wednesday night, was that this robbery also had something to do with *The Circular Gardens*. But why? Then he recalled the badge he thought he had seen under one of the robbers' coats. Was the book being officially suppressed? If so, why? Why this on top of all the other mystery surrounding the novel?

This question had threatened to rob him of sleep. Moreover, he began to fear for his personal safety. What

if the robbers were not satisfied with their mission? The fact that his door had a sturdy deadbolt was only partial comfort. He ended up spending the night in a hotel, resolving to move to the apartment Diana's mother had found for him in Mount Immanuel. Fortunately, utilities were included in the rent: he would leave no official record of his moving. He would even rent a post office box, rather than have mail delivered to his new address.

The next morning he had rented a van and begun moving his belongings to the new apartment. He reserved the van for a week. He intended to do the moving piecemeal, over the next few days. On the way over to the new apartment, he had taken a circuitous route, watching the rear-view mirror for any signs of being followed. There were none.

Wakeman's new apartment was on the fourth and top floor of its building. The only other occupant lived on the first floor. In the center of the building was an elaborate conical stairwell, at the bottom of which you could look up and see the balcony of each floor, and finally the ceiling four stories overhead. The apartments, two on each floor except the fourth, were built around this stairwell. Wakeman's apartment was the largest in the building: it covered the same area as two on the lower floors, and completely encircled the conical stairwell. Thus, from any point in the apartment, one

could go in either direction to get to any other point. And, though the apartment was huge, with six rooms, you could hardly get lost: just keep going and you would wind up back where you started from.

On three sides the outside view was blocked by other buildings, except for the window from which, if you craned your neck, you could see a portion of the Old City, the river, and the University beyond. The fourth side, however, overlooked a small market square. On the opposite side of the square was a bank, abandoned since everyone had moved out of Mission Hill. A tower rose beside the bank, to the level of Wakeman's windows. At the top of the tower was a clock. For some reason, the clock was still running, and, as far as Wakeman could tell, continued to display the correct time on its hexagonal face. Every half hour, it tolled softly. And above the clock was the ruined mountainside, rubble spilling down its face, and right in the middle, the new rock-face. It stared impassively over Wakeman's rooftop at the city below.

Wakeman had spent most of the morning cleaning and organizing the new apartment. One of the first things he did was to mount the pictures he had brought from his old apartment, where the walls had not been big enough for all of them. He had gradually replaced most of his landscapes

and portraits with paintings of little representational content. Abstracts. In the new apartment these were mounted first, and in the most prominent places.

Periodically Wakeman walked the complete circle around the apartment, savoring its bigness and looking out the windows. As the morning then early afternoon wore on, he had become aware that the quarter into which he had moved was not as deserted as he had thought.

First there were the immigrants who lived in a building on the opposite side of the square. Wakeman could not be sure, but he thought the immigrants were all of one family. They seemed to look alike: all of them below average height, stocky of frame, the men all bearded or mustached, the women stout and ruddy-cheeked. At various times of the morning Wakeman heard sounds from the building, sounds alternately of merriment and conflict. Ethnic-sounding music played for a while, then loud, arguing voices wafted over the square. At one point the door opened and five or six people seemed to be flushed from the building, after which there was an interval of waving arms and raised voices speaking a foreign tongue. After a while the people hurried out of the square into a side street; an hour later they were back, filing into their building. Soon afterwards the merriment started again.

Then there was the old man who lived in a building

next to Wakeman's. Wakeman had noticed him the first time walking slowly across the square from the bank building, leaning heavily on a cane. After minutes of slow progress, he had stopped in front of the adjacent building and sat down on a bench. By craning his head, Wakeman could see the old man sitting there. After a while, he got up and started back across the square, disappearing in an alley next to the bank. A while later, Wakeman saw him again, creeping across the square toward his bench. By the afternoon, Wakeman had detected a pattern in the old man's movements. When the immigrants began arguing inside their building, the old man started for the bank. When he was about half-way across the square, the immigrants flooded from their front door and began yelling at each other. By the time they exited the square, the old man reached his alley and disappeared. A few minutes later, the ethnic music would start up again, and the old man came out of the alley. When he reached again the center of the square, the immigrants flooded out of the side street and re-entered their building.

Behind the square the mountain rose steeply. Here was an area of damaged buildings, which, given the rise of the terrain, was visible over the roofs of the square's buildings. A bulldozer and a truck, occasionally visible as they struggled up and down the steep streets of the

quarter, were operating there, clearing out the rubble. Wakeman supposed this was where Diana's father was working. Wakeman could see no signs of progress; as the day progressed, the pile of rubble seemed to get bigger in spite of the truck's comings and goings.

Presiding over all this, besides the new rock-face, was the clock in its tower over the bank. Once, as Wakeman sat resting, he focused his gaze on the clock's narrow black hands. After a while, it seemed that he could see the hands moving, ever so slowly, around the hexagonal face of the clock. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the old man start across the square. With each slow step, there was a tiny increment of movement from the clock hands. Then the immigrants poured from their building and began arguing on the square. The truck inched down the hill, full of rubble; there was more movement from the clock. It seemed to Wakeman somehow that the activity in and around the square was part of the clock's machinery. Only he couldn't decide whether the activity was turning the hands of the clock, or whether the clock was impelling the activity. And somewhere, there was the activity of Gabriel, Diana, Daniel: he imagined them eating, talking, making love, smoking, writing, each action coordinated with the movements of the clock.

There was also the relationship of his own movements

and thoughts to the clock.

By about two in the afternoon Wakeman's energy was almost exhausted. He needed to take a shower and begin grading student papers. The apartment was almost as organized as it needed to be, anyway.

A half-hour later, Wakeman had finished his shower. He put on a bath robe and walked down the hall, past several rooms, around a corner, and into his living room. There was a woman, her back turned, looking out the window. When he approached, she turned. It was Diana. She was holding a piece of paper.

"I found this," she said. "You may find it interesting."

Wakeman took the paper. It looked to have been cut from a newspaper. At the top were the words *Book Reviews*. And just below was the title *The Circular Gardens*, Fourier's name, the publisher, and so forth.

He looked up at Diana. "Where did you find this?"

"In an old Westonia paper at home. Mother gets them some Sundays."

He started to read the article, but changed his mind. He found her presence distracting. Standing in front of the window like that, with the afternoon sun pouring over her and blurring her edges, she looked like part of a painting. The painting seemed to include the hexagonal

clock face. Its juxtaposition with Diana seemed to explode with meaning, but meaning that was hidden nonetheless.

"Well," he said. "Have you shown it to Gabriel yet?"

"No. You can tell him, can't you?"

She had come to him instead of Gabriel. . . . "You haven't seen him today?"

"No. He'll be at The Bishop Berkeley later. We're playing there tonight."

"The True Bohemians?"

"Yes. I would show it to Bruno, but I may not have time."

He could think of nothing to say. All he could do was watch her standing there in the window, looking like a painting. She returned his stare a minute then said, "Do you have anything to drink?"

"Oh . . . sure. There's some whiskey here somewhere. Why don't you have a seat." He went into the kitchen to look for the booze. Actually, he was glad to get away for a minute, she had so rattled him. He needed to get hold of himself, or he would seem like a fool to her, accustomed as she was to the verbose Gabriel. What could he think of to talk about with this almost non-verbal young woman?

"I . . . saw you last night," he said as he handed

her the drink.

"Oh? Where?"

"Not far from Gabriel's. I was just walking. I do that sometimes when I get restless at night."

"Had you tried to find Bruno?"

"Yes. Well, no. I mean, I started to, but. . . ."

"It was late and you thought you might interrupt something," she said, and almost laughed. It was the first time he had seen her come anywhere close to laughter. Yet it was not quite a laugh: she just threw back her head, shaking her brown hair around her shoulders, and widened her eyes, all to the effect of something between irony and hysteria. Then, as instantly as the expression had come, the face became again a blank. And what had she meant? . . .

She was solemn again, as if the near-mirth had never been. "Do you have a twin?"

"Why, no. . . . Why do you ask," he said in surprise. Did she know somehow about the *doppleganger*?

"I saw someone that looked like you, on the square outside yesterday. He looked right at me, but didn't say anything. I thought. . . ."

"I haven't told anyone this," said Wakeman. "But maybe I do have a twin."

"Why not tell anyone?"

"It's a weird situation. To my knowledge I don't have a twin, or, for that matter, any living relatives. Yet, I too have seen someone who looks like me, just the other night. It was on the plaza in the Old City. It was night, but a lamp played over his face and it was like I was looking into a mirror."

"How odd."

"I plan on driving to my home-town in the next day or so to see if I can come up with anything like a long-lost twin. That would give us something in common. I mean, you and Daniel being twins and all."

She said nothing for a time. Then, while looking out the window she began in a remote voice, "When we were young we had a neighbor who used to tell us that always one twin was a demon. It had escaped from another world, where everyone has an exact duplicate. She said the entrance to this world was the mirror."

"How strange," said Wakeman. "I guess as children it was easy to believe such a thing."

"Children see things adults don't," murmured Diana. "Yes, I did believe. Sometimes I would walk between two mirrors in a department store. It seemed like I could see someone besides myself deep within the mirrors. It seemed like it was always a man, sitting at a desk. I could never see him in the outer mirrors, just deep inside the

reflections."

Her somber tone had given him goose-bumps, had almost put him in a trance. "You see it too. . ." he whispered. "Don't you?"

Now she was peering at him with those great serious brown eyes. "What do you mean?"

He shook himself. "I don't know. Never mind. It's just that. . . ."

"Just what?"

"It just seems like I'm about to understand something."

"Something's about to congeal," she said. "Something's about to happen."

"Yes. It seems like I can see it around me sometimes. I'm part of it. Things seem to mean something, but don't."

She was still looking at him. "You seem lost in time somehow. What is it you're waiting for? Your life has no object."

It was the first time she had said anything of substance about his character. He felt somehow flustered. "Well, I do have a doctorate in Literature," he said, rising. "And I have written a few books."

"I can't explain it, I guess," she said, still looking closely at him.

Then she rose.

"Please, don't go," said Wakeman. "I feel that we're leaving something unsaid. Somehow, I feel we've a kinship of sorts. Of the spirit, I mean."

She had walked to the door, where she turned. "I have to go. Come to the club tonight and talk to Bruno about the review. I don't know about a kinship. You should not depend on me. You cannot weave yourself into things."

Then she walked out the door. Wakeman glanced over and saw the drink he'd made for her, sitting on the table by the window, refracting the afternoon sunlight. It was untouched. Through the window he could see the clock across the square, its hands moving inexorably. He got up and closed the blinds, then sat down and read the book review Diana had brought.

The Circular Gardens by Paul Fourier.

A strange work by first-time novelist Fourier, this slim volume inserts us into a world awaiting possible apocalypse. The novel is set during the approach of Pacelli's comet, which has had a course change and is heading for the planet. (Pacelli's comet in reality is to become visible in several months time, and, in reality, will not come anywhere near the planet.) Welcome to a

world swirling with the Dionysian revelry of the Festival, a world titillated with its possible end, a place of strange cults, revolutions, and many mysterious characters with ambiguous motives.

Wakeman looked at the date at the top of the page. The paper was dated several months previously, several months before it was ever thought the comet would go off course.

It was about nine when Wakeman rose in the shadows of his living room and went to his bedroom to dress in preparation for going to the club. In a few minutes he was ready to go. He put on his jacket and put the review and the latest novel fragment into his coat pocket. It was then that he found the card given him by McX, on the bridge, Tuesday night. In the excitement of finding the novel fragment in the same pocket, he had forgotten entirely to look at the card. The name written on it was *Paul Fourier*. Under the name was drawn the circular transit system map.

CHAPTER TEN

The Bishop Berkeley was located just off the Old City Plaza. Not walking distance. Wakeman strode down the mountainside and approached the Mount Immanuel transit station. As he pressed his travel card into the turnstile he happened to look up at the sign with its transit symbol above the station's ticket booth. Someone had defaced it. At the point where all the circles intersected--in reality the Crystal Palace--someone had drawn what appeared to be an explosion. Now what could that mean, thought Wakeman. He didn't have long to consider, as he was being swept to the embarkation area by a crowd of costumed revelers.

Before long Wakeman had disembarked in the Crystal Palace, and made his way to the platform from which he would board the train for the plaza. The city was gearing up for the climax of the Festival Saturday night, and the Palace was frantic with swirling multitudes of painted, costumed revelers. He could see them flashing by in the overloaded transit cars, throwing confetti from the suspended walkways above, pushing along the crowded conveyor belts that united far points of the terminal. The place was a din of yelling and singing, of roaring transit cars and amplified music. Wakeman could smell a melange of exotic perfumes and incense: Festival was in the air. At

last the train arrived and Wakeman got on. In minutes he had arrived in the much smaller Plaza station and ridden the packed lift up to the great square.

On the square during Festival, it was not unusual for there to be numerous speakers haranguing crowds late into the night. Tonight was no exception. Political extremists, religious fanatics, and entertainers of various types had stationed themselves at various spots around the square. Wakeman stopped to hear one speaker, who was being heckled by an impressionist. The speaker was standing on top of the stone railing which separated the square from Berkeley Avenue below. For a while he held forth on his topic, a political one, then the impressionist jumped up on the railing beside him and began imitating him. A few seconds of this, and the speaker pushed the impressionist off the railing into the crowd.

Wakeman quickly tired of the speaker and his heckler and proceeded across the square toward the nightclub. At first he took no notice of the speaker haranguing the crowd from the commemorative arch in the park at the center of the square. Then he stopped, struck by the realization that this speaker looked familiar, that he was, indeed, McX, in outrageous costume: the old man looked, tonight, like a cross between some kind of bagpipe player and a witch-doctor.

Wakeman pushed through the crowd that had assembled in front of the old man, who stood on a bench. This station, combined with his tallness, gave McX considerable height over the crowd. Dangling over his chest was a silver necklace, attached to which was a large pendant. The pendant was made of two silver circles, one inside the other. Again, the transit symbol. The mustache was wilder than ever, transcending the limitations, however, of a mere handlebar.

"The hour of your doom draws near!" proclaimed the old man. "The Tablets prophecy it! Behold! The comet approaches!" With a flourishing movement of his arms and pendant, the old man pointed to the heavens. The night was clear. And there was no doubt about what McX was talking about. One whole section of the sky was lit up, almost dazzlingly so, by a band of white. Wakeman's breath caught in his throat. Not used to being able to see the stars in Bonneville's typically cloudy skies, he had not noticed the comet until now. Others in the McX's audience were similarly impressed. A long "ohhhh" came from the crowd.

The old man was continuing his oration. "In days, He will raise his Great Book and cast it to the ground of Heaven, shattering it to pieces! Pray that your lives will be even memory!" A chorus of shouts came from di-

rectly in front of McX, from a collection of people with shaved heads and colorful robes. They punctuated McX's every sentence by shaking small rattling objects above their heads. McX had attracted a crowd of disciples?

"Revel in your end!" shouted McX. "Know that nothingness is the whirlpool which sucks you into the great eternal moment!" At this point the crowd in front of McX seemed to be reaching a point of frenzy, and just to McX's rear a huge bonfire sprang up with such suddenness it looked like magic. McX stood juxtaposed to it, a creature of fire and mystery. Then there were people dancing all around, in several large circles. Wakeman drew away started again for the nightclub. At this point he began to feel that he was being watched. And it was as if he knew who it was watching him, even before he saw Daniel Eidle standing motionless near McX's podium, his brown eyes glaring, his brown hair tousled. Wakeman stopped and stared. Then a circle of dancers moved between Wakeman and the young man and when it had gone so had Daniel.

Wakeman resumed his journey to the Bishop Berkeley. "Imagine the Great Author of all things, as he imagines you," continued McX. "Pray that you continue in His mind after the comet, because that will be the limit of your existence!"

When he entered the club, Wakeman was greeted by

familiar music of the True Bohemians, who, with Diana at their center, were playing on the stage at the rear of the huge room. Diana was bathed in white light from a stage lamp. The rest of the group played under a variety of reds and blues.

When Wakeman's eyes adjusted to the darkness, he began looking for Gabriel. At last he found him, sitting at a table to a far side of the stage. When Wakeman approached, three other people got up and left. One of the men touched Wakeman on the arm and said, "He's in a strange mood tonight."

Gabriel sat, shoulders hunched moodily, sipping a drink. He ignored Wakeman for a few moments after the latter had sat down. This, thought Wakeman, was the man who, according to the rumors, had created such an uproar in the Old City bars. Wakeman was the one to break the silence.

"I've had something of a breakthrough on the book," he said.

Gabriel only nodded and gave Wakeman a lopsided smile of unhappy irony.

"And I'm not sure if you'll like what you read, even though this review does give us something more in the way of a vague outline of the action. It's pretty weird."

"No weirder than this, I bet." The director handed

Wakeman some pages. *The Circular Gardens* was inscribed at the top of the first page in big letters.

"Another fragment?" said Wakeman. "Where did you get it?"

Gabriel shook his head. "Just read it. Just the first part."

Wakeman could barely see in the darkness of the club. At last Gabriel handed him a cigarette lighter. Wakeman flicked the lighter and began to read:

But he had much more to do.

After the interrogation Wakeman was set free:

Wakeman gasped. "Bruno . . ." he said, then gestured wordlessly. The band had stopped and Diana had sat down at the table.

The director looked over at Wakeman angrily. "Damn it, Wakeman," he said. "Just what is your relationship to this novel, anyway?" He seized the fragment and rifled through the pages.

"Bruno's on edge because Arswine's here," said Diana. She nodded to a table nearby, at which several people sat, loudly talking. "He's the one at the end."

The other young director, every bit as dark and

intense as Gabriel, and a good bit bigger, seemed to notice the attention he was getting. He got up.

"Shit," said Gabriel. "That's not why I'm on edge. It's this damn novel. Now look what you've done."

Arswine sauntered over. "Good evening, Gabriel. Mind if I sit down?" He sat down at the only remaining chair. "How's the project going? I'll submit my script Monday."

Gabriel took a sip of his drink. "We're just smoothing out the rough edges. It'll go to Wilde soon, if this damn fighting in Westonia doesn't wreck everything."

"Ah, complications," said Arswine. "I just talked with Wilde today. Made arrangements to get the script to her safely. What kind of brilliant ideas did you apply to this brilliant script?"

"I'm not accustomed to sharing my ideas with the competition," replied Gabriel, stiffly.

"Well, I certainly don't mind sharing mine. I've decided to make a musical of *The Circular Gardens*."

"A musical!" shouted Gabriel.

"Sure. Can't you picture the old doctors in the mental ward in a chorus line? Or maybe Inman in a song and dance routine about his puzzling experience? Hear his shoes tapping down those great endless halls?"

Gabriel glowered at the other director. "I was

conferring with my assistant and my screenwriter," he said.

Arswine rose, laughing. "Things do get intense in the final stretches, don't they?" He nodded to Diana and walked away.

"Is he serious?" said Wakeman.

"No," replied Diana after Gabriel refused to speak. "He enjoys playing practical jokes on poor Bruno. This year at the film festival in Westonia he got there early and pretended to be Bruno. He brought an awful film with him, a joke, and showed it as if it was a serious work. Bruno has yet to get over that."

"The bastard bought up all the copies of *The Circular Gardens* in Bonneville," said Gabriel.

"Do you know that?" said Wakeman. He surveyed Arswine's company. Several of them were big, aggressive-looking men. An idea occurred to him. "I wonder if he was behind those thugs who strong-armed me out of the novel on the square Tuesday night. But of course one of them did have a badge, I think. . . ."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Gabriel.

"Oh, I haven't seen you since Wednesday, have I?" said Wakeman. "Wednesday night, after I saw you, I went for a walk on the plaza. I found this strange all-night bookstore, and in it, a copy of *The Circular Gardens*."

"What! Why haven't you told me?"

"I don't know. Everything's happening so fast. And I did try to call you, over and over, and got no answer. I even stopped by your place last night, and you weren't home. But I don't have the novel anymore." He raised his hand to forestall the director's outrage. "I got robbed after I left the place. They took my money and the book."

"Why would anyone rob you of a book?" said Gabriel in exasperation.

"Something I've been wondering myself. I've wondered if taking the money wasn't a way to make me think they weren't just after the book."

"Was that bastard Arswine one of the robbers?" said Gabriel.

"I . . . don't think so," replied Wakeman. "But it was pretty dark, and it was awfully confusing."

"You don't know that it is Arswine who has been depriving you of the book," said Diana to Gabriel. "I don't think it is. In fact, the bass player in the band knows one of Arswine's men. He told him Arswine has gotten nowhere on the script."

"Really?" said Gabriel. "Why haven't you told me? Why is everyone holding out on me!"

"I just found out, right before the show," replied Diana. "Don't make it worse than it is, Bruno."

"Damn!" said Gabriel, grasping a drink with both hand.

"All is not lost, Bruno," said Wakeman. "I still have a section of the novel. The book was so beat up that it apparently fell apart in my pocket. It's safe and sound in my file cabinet at home. I didn't want to risk bringing it with me, after being robbed of the rest of it."

"Well, that's encouraging," said Gabriel. "At least I think it is. But to get back to the subject of the name Wakeman in the novel. . . ."

Wakeman looked at Diana, who regarded him with hooded eyes.

"Look, Gabriel," said Wakeman. "I didn't intend for it to turn out this way."

"What is your name doing in this novel?" pressed the director.

"I . . . I wish I knew," replied Wakeman. "I may be connected to it in ways I don't understand."

"Could you be more specific?"

"It's just that . . . I may have written the damn thing."

"What!"

"I know," said Wakeman, waving his hand in exasperation. "It seems impossible to me, too. But, several

years ago, I wrote *The Exile and Other Stories* under the pen name Paul Fourier. You know, that other book you found of 'Fourier's.' If you don't believe me, you can check with the publisher. It's registered with them."

"Well, there are several Paul Fouriers in the world, surely," said Gabriel. "I mean, stranger things have happened."

"Just the line of reasoning I took at the beginning of all this," said Wakeman. "That's why I didn't come clean with you until now. But several other mysterious things have happened. First, the opening night of the Festival, I sleepwalked in the city, and came to in the Crystal Palace."

Gabriel waved his hand. "Interesting. But what does it have to do with the matter at hand?"

"I'm getting to that," said Wakeman. "When I got home from the Palace that evening there was this fragment on my computer, titled *The Circular Gardens*. When I saw it, I thought that I had written it. I thought it was an improvisation that I'd begun, maybe years ago, as the beginning of a new novel or story. Then when I got to the ball that night and talked to you and learned about Fourier, moving into the mansion, and writing the novel and all that, I concluded that the fragment was not mine at all."

"Why didn't you tell me about writing *The Exile* right

then?"

"I'm . . . not sure. It was so confusing to me that I didn't know where to start. After waking up in the Crystal Palace and all. Then your hash. It hardly seemed real."

"All right. You didn't write *The Circular Gardens*."

"Then what were those two fragments doing on my computer? You *could* pass it off as coincidence. Somehow, maybe they leaked into my computer via the city's Compu-Link network. But what an astronomical coincidence if they did! After all, part of a novel written by Paul Fourier leaking into the computer of a man who'd written a book under the pen name Paul Fourier? I mean, there has to be a logical link, doesn't there? Coincidences that wild just don't happen!"

"Maybe you were copying this novel, for some reason, into your computer simply because it was written by a man named the same as your pen name," suggested Diana. "The novel had come to your attention because of the names, then you lost your memory because of an entirely unrelated event."

Wakeman was silent for a minute. "Well, that sounds plausible. But then this pops up. Now my name is in the novel. The mystery thickens!"

"It does," said Gabriel. "Especially around the

identity of that Fourier up on the mountain. That is, considering your own obvious connection."

"That's the other part of my mystery, that I'm almost desperate to clear up. But that may be close. You see, I know who Paul Fourier, or at least that Paul Fourier, is."

"You do? Who?"

Wakeman took the card out of his pocket and handed it to Gabriel. "Remember that old man I told you about, this McX?"

"How could I forget?"

"Well, Wednesday night, after I'd left your house, I saw him again. He gave me this card. McX is Paul Fourier!"

"Amazing. . . ." muttered Gabriel.

"Do you want to meet him?" said Wakeman.

"What? Of course. But what do you mean?"

"Just a few minutes ago, I saw him, preaching on the square. Something about the comet and the end of the world."

"Let's go," said Gabriel.

"I can't," said Diana. "Break's almost over."

Gabriel and Wakeman walked briskly out of the bar and into the alley that led to the square.

The pair reached the plaza and walked up to the arch.

"He was here, just twenty minutes ago," said Wakeman.

"Damn!"

"Why didn't you say something immediately?" said Gabriel.

"When you shoved that fragment at me, I forgot about him," protested Wakeman. "Will you please stop asking me that? I am not your enemy!"

"All right. All right."

The pair walked around the perimeter of the plaza, in and out of crowds standing around other speakers, but saw no sign of McX. Or Fourier, whoever he was.

"Ask Daniel, he'll tell you he was here," said Wakeman.

"Daniel?"

"Yes," said Wakeman. "Everywhere I see one, I see the other. There's something very strange going on between those two."

"So Fourier does come down off that mountain," said Gabriel dreamily.

"Yes, he does." replied Wakeman. "Apparently he travels at will in the city. There must be a way off the mountain that we don't know about. That is, unless he uses his helicopter, which I doubt. Someone would have noticed it."

Gabriel and Wakeman returned to the club and sat down.

After a long pause, Gabriel muttered, looking dreamily at the band, "It's the mirror phenomenon."

"The what?" said Wakeman.

"The mirror phenomenon," repeated Gabriel. "I was just thinking about your name being in the novel. If you wrote it, why you include yourself in it. Someone once said that art is a mirror held up to a mirror which reflects nature. But in your case, you became dissatisfied with nature, and one day . . . you turned the mirror, ever so slightly, and you glimpsed another world, the one between two mutually reflecting mirrors. At first you were content to regard this world from afar, contemplating its mysteries. But then you became enchanted with it, and nature began to recede. Every day, you turned the mirror a little more, until nature was only an elongated verticle sliver. You longed to eliminate nature altogether, as some painters and musicians do, but you found it was impossible. You were always catching some of the frame, perhaps the hand that held the frame. Your art from then on was a mere process of adjusting the mirror. Making the best of the situation, you wrote from that time onward, in varying degrees, about your own confinement within the mirror-world."

Music from The True Bohemians slid over the club like a great icy sheet. Gabriel leaned toward Wakeman and

whispered, "Madness. . . ."

Wakeman eased back in his chair. There had been something hypnotic about what Gabriel had said.

Dancers floated about the room. The song being played was a virtual drone. It was as if time had stopped. A single silver note bulged and spread over the instant. Diana stood at a keyboard, her eyes fixed on a point above the audience. Wakeman watched her intently, coming to a more complete notion now of why he was so attracted to her. She was of the type he had noticed on very rare occasion who seemed scarcely to exist. Such people might be said to be more spirit than matter; at least, their physical parts are in some way toned down. They move from place to place without effort or noise. On the rare occasion when they eat, they engage in minimal lip-smacking, mastication, and swallowing. Farting and belching are unheard from them. Was Diana the apotheosis of the type? The answer was in the outline of her motionless form against the other objects on the stage. It seemed that he could almost see through her. . . . She seemed too frail to bear up under the strain of the opposing forces of the objects surrounding her: the keyboard, the amplifiers, the other musicians, the amplified sound itself.

And yet earlier he had envisioned her as a painting.

A painting, of course, existed in a much more forthright way than the wraith which she seemed now. Yet the two did not seem mutually exclusive in Diana's case. . . .

Wakeman emerged from a trancelike state to find Gabriel gone, and what appeared to be a disturbance breaking out on stage. Some men had come up on stage bearing guitars. "These people want some end of the world music," shouted one of the men. He pushed the True Bohemians' guitar player out of the way and plugged his instrument into an amplifier. Another man walked behind the drums. He pushed the drummer off his stool and took his place. In moments the new band began a loud, hard number. The club seemed suddenly to become much more crowded. People in costume were filing in on both sides of the large room. Leering masks jumped out at Wakeman through the smoke. The new arrivals were yelling at other people in the club. They poured onto the dance floor. Each tried to do a dance in accord with his costume. A whole melange of dances was taking place, the dancers bumping into one another, upsetting drinks on tables nearby, and overrunning the stage, from which The True Bohemians were reateating in disarray.

Then Wakeman noticed Gabriel and Arswine talking in a small alcove off the main room. Gabriel was holding the fragment, pointing to it. Then the two planted their feet

and began shouting at each other. Wakeman could hear Gabriel's voice above the commotion. But he could pick out only certain words: "stole," "charlatan," "Wilde" were among them. And then, in concert, the directors started shoving one on another. Soon, Arswine was sprawled on the floor. His fall had upset a table, and he lay in a storm of broken glass, ice cubes, ash trays, and cigarette butts.

The melee had attracted the attention of Arswine's men. Three or four launched themselves in Gabriel's direction. In seconds, they had a hold on the director. One punched him in the stomach.

At first paralyzed, not understanding what was happening, Wakeman now jumped up, picked up a chair, and brought it down on the heads and backs of two of Arswine's men. One of them collapsed to the floor on top of the renegade director, who had just about managed to get up when he was collapsed upon. The pile of bodies on the floor blocked Arswine's men's access to Wakeman. Another of them tripped over Arswine and sprawled to the floor. Wakeman used the confusion to punch Gabriel's one remaining captor in the ear. The man's face scrunched up in pain, and he put a hand up to the ear. This allowed Gabriel to extricate himself. Wakeman grabbed his arm and pulled him along.

"Let's get out of here," yelled Wakeman. The two men raced for the door, bumping into two bouncers on the way out.

"What the hell's going on?" said one of them. He made as if to grab Wakeman's shirt, but Wakeman knocked the hand away and plunged onward, Gabriel at his rear.

The two men raced down the alley and into the plaza. Wakeman could hear footsteps behind him. His endurance was flagging. Gabriel now ran ahead of him. Wakeman could see something hanging from the director's pocket. It was working itself free, then it fell to the pavement. The novel fragment. Wakeman slowed down, grasped the fragment by a page, and then dropped it. He could hear pounding footsteps behind him. He ran on.

At that point, a large crowd of people, perhaps a parade of some sort, emerged from an alley and began marching across the square. Wakeman and Gabriel ran to opposite sides of the crowd. Wakeman slowed enough to look behind. He could see Arswine's men, their faces red with exertion, pushing people out of the way, looking frantically this way and that.

Wakeman had no choice but to run into the alley from which the crowd had emerged. His breath was now coming in gasps. He slowed long enough to look behind him. His pursuers had reached the entrance to the alley. They

hadn't seen him yet, but they were coming his way. Wakeman came to yet another alley, perpendicular to the first one. He darted into it, hoping that Arswine's bullies hadn't seen him.

He could hardly run now. He looked desperately for places to hide. There were several doors, the back entrances to businesses fronting a larger street, opening onto the alley. He tried several, in succession. All were locked. He thought he could hear running, voices, from behind.

Then the alley ended into a small square, surrounded on all sides by low, featureless brick buildings. Wakeman ran into the square and came to the entrance of a ramshackle building with a ticket booth in front of it. A sign over the booth read *Hall of Mirrors*. Wakeman ran up to the booth and plunked down several bills. The clerk, moving soundlessly in his glass booth like an insect in a jar, pressed a button and door opened to the side of the booth. Wakeman ran in.

He appeared to have entered an anteroom, its furnishings--several chairs, a sofa, end and coffee tables--surprisingly opulent and lit brightly by several ornate table lamps. One wall had no furnishings by it; in this wall were several doors. Each door had a sign above it. *Passage* read one sign. *Infinite Reflections* read another.

Labyrinth read another. The door nearest bore the sign *Madness*. As this was the closest, and Arswine's men might barge in any minute, Wakeman opened it, stepped through, and slammed it behind him. For a moment he ignored the mirrors that greeted him: he examined the door he'd slammed; to his surprise and relief, there was a lock on it. He slid the bolt into place and sought a wall he could lean upon to retrieve his breath.

But, apparently, there was no wall: only mirrors. Wakeman reeled about in disorientation. He seemed on a vast plane with a myriad other Wakemans, all reeling silently about without any sort of topographical reference points. At last he closed his eyes and felt his way toward any sort of limit. After what seemed ages, his fingers touched cold glass. The glass seemed to give way before his fingers.

Wakeman opened his eyes. He seemed to have wondered into a dimly lit office. A cluttered desk sat several feet in front of him. A man sat behind the desk, his arms propped on the desk. He was looking at Wakeman with no hint of surprise. Wakeman stopped and peered at the man, who seemed familiar. Yet the closer Wakeman looked, the more his vision became distorted. The room seemed to grow oblong, like he was looking through the wrong end of a telescope. Suddenly the man seemed miles away.

But the desk was close. And on it was a book. It was a copy of *The Circular Gardens*. Whose book could this be? Wakeman tried to make out the features of the man at the desk, but he seemed a mere pin head in the distance. Wakeman thought to ask if he could look at the book, but his words came out "Four thousand six hundred and llama sled," and echoed around more like they had been uttered in a vast hall than a claustrophobic hall of mirrors. He tried again: "All art strives to the condition of mosquitoes." The words were as garbled as they were nonsensical. Then he gave up and reached for the book, whose letters looked giant in comparison with everything else.

But his hand made contact not with book but with glass, and with rather more force than he would have thought, for the glass shattered at his touch. Now all he could see was himself. That is, he guessed the reflection he saw was of himself: the glass had so shattered that his features were reassembled as in a jigsaw puzzle gone awry: in one corner of his perspective was a nose; in another a portion of a leg and a foot. In another an eye blinked at him. On the floor in front of him lay a mouth. It was moving, as if speaking, jabbering even. Then it opened wide.

Wakeman could not tell if the scream was his mind or in his ears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Q: Channel Six News welcomes Alex Altman, Professor of Philosophy at the University. Professor Altman is here today to tell us about the cult known as the Saints of the Last Day. Professor Altman, the Saints seem to have sprung up overnight. Now you see them everywhere, dancing in circles. What has brought about their rise?

A: Well, first, the dancers are associated only with one faction of the cult. But I'll get to that later. In answer to your question, two main developments are related to the rise of the cult. One is the approach of Pacelli's comet. Two, the discovery, some two decades ago, of the so-called Universal Tablets. Scientists have worked for years on de-coding the tablets, a task which has proved enormously difficult due to the fact that the language changes throughout them. There's not much information about this decoding, and very little else in the way of scientific information about the Tablets, but a number of rumors have sprung up about them. First, they supposedly forecast the coming of the Pacelli comet. . . .

Q: Astounding!

A: Rumor also has it that the Tablets also prophesy other major events, such as wars, our present civil strife, the actual rise of the cult, even the discovery of the Tablets

themselves.

Q: The rise of the cult? Doesn't that put the cult in the paradoxical position of fulfilling prophecy in its very acceptance of that prophecy? Has anyone thought of deliberately notforming a cult, just to stymie prophecy?

A: Perhaps, but human affairs don't work that way.

Anyway, supposedly the cult was formed before the prophecy concerning it was deciphered. This evidence of the Tablets' accuracy has led some in the cult to believe that Pacelli marks the end of the world. This is where the cult splits into factions.

Q: Why is that?

A: In spite of its accuracy in predicting other major events, even the coming of the comet, the Tablets are ambiguous with respect to the comet's effect on earth.

Q: Thus, interpretation comes into play. . . .

A: Correct. Though the major factions of the cult are in agreement in terms of basic philosophy. . . .

Q: Why don't you tell us of this philosophy first.

A: All right. For all factions, history is a great Book. The Tablets are the only part. . . .

Q: Wait. Wait a minute. A great book? Whatever gave rise to such a notion?

A: This came about in order to reconcile two contradictory assertions of the Tablets themselves: One, that the

Book is a world of its own, and not to be seen as referential to the world, and two, that the Book is to be read as an account of the world. To encompass the world with the Book accomplishes this reconciliation.

Q: All right. I interrupted again. Please go on.

A; The Tablets are the only part of the Book that has been actually seen by man--they are like a symbol in reverse, the material symbolizing the ideal--and there are many millions more tablets not yet discovered. Everything, the minutest action, is inscribed in the Book in ways not comprehensible to man. Each sentence, each letter or mark in the Tablets contains myriad meanings. Interactions between parts of the text generate new meanings, something like the process of multiplication. Even in its broadest statements, there are other interpretations and keys to other interpretations that broaden the scope of the tablets far beyond their apparent size. But even the most fanatical of the cult's followers agree that at some point, despite their accuracy, the tablets are uninterpretable. The tablets themselves proclaim their uninterpretability. Thus we can get only a broad idea of what has happened and will happen. In the specific case of the comet, no one knows whether it will destroy the earth, or pass by harmlessly. Apparently, the tablets are contradictory on this matter, as well as on the nature of the

Author, or the relationship of the Master Plot to man.

Q: Master plot?

A: A term the cult uses to imply the course of human events. Conceptually, it is bound up with the notion of the Author. One faction does not believe in an Author. It postulates a system under which humanity is its own author, the Book being written merely as a record of human affairs, after the fact. The plot is advanced under this system something like a cart, harnessed to a team of human oxen. According to this group something can and must be done to keep the comet from destroying earth. This faction, however, is the only one which believes explicitly in free will. The three others tend strongly toward quietism and inaction under the threat of the comet.

Q: This is the most reputable faction of the cult, is it not?

A: Yes. It has even entered politics. Robert McKenzie, hero of the last war, and Member of Parliament, has espoused its cause. Q: Right. He's running for Prime Minister arguing that the present regime is endangering the world by its inaction in the face of the comet. He wants a nuclear strike against the comet, to change its course, or blow it up. There's evidence of massive support for his position. The present administration, of course, rests its policy on science, which says the comet

is not a danger to earth. But go on.

A: A second faction agrees that, indeed, the plot is not complete. Humans, however, have little to do with its advancement. The Author under this system is History--a purposive entity comprised of the laws of cause and effect, all the way back to the first cause--which determines events to come. Humanity under this system is something like a surfer hanging ten on the breaker of time and history. They say it's fine to try to stop the comet, but whether it's stopped or not has nothing to do with human effort, that we can't change the tide of history, and that we have no idea whether our efforts might be successful. Not only is it not known whether the comet will be stopped, it is unknown whether humanity will try to stop it. Under their very system, they can take no position on what must be done about the comet.

A third position, also tending to quietism, posits a Book that is finished, in which our perception of movement and change is an illusion, an arbitrary but natural law of the narrative. Human life is fixed and static.

Q: Bizarre.

A: Not really, Milt. This position has a strong theoretical foundation in the ancient Sciatic School. Parmesan, then Zero and Melissa, rejected the doctrine of the flow of time and posited in its place a doctrine in which

change is seen as illusion. They argued that it was impossible that existence could begin in nothing and end in nothing. Why would something that does not exist suddenly exist? Reality is not founded upon time, they said.

After Parmesan came Humperdinkes, Republicanes, and Ann X. Agoras, who all tried to reconcile the appearance of change with the obvious--to them--truth of Parmesan's dictum that time is an illusion. Our illusion of time may come from our ability to visit an infinite number of static instants, which in themselves have no basic relation.

Those who hold to the truth of static time also take no position on the destruction of the comet, because not only has human fate already been decided, but human history has already occurred, is in fact occurring, all events simultaneously, at this very instant. These concepts are the well-spring of paralysis. Action against the comet cannot occur, because whatever happens in regard to it has already occurred, *is* occurring. Thus this faction also never gets beyond theory, due to its contradictions and paradoxes, which have to do with conceptualizing time *within* time.

Yet a fourth position believes in the *ideal* of static experience, and that such an ideal state is prophesied by

the Tablets. Their cosmology posits a conscious Author, in whose mind the Book resides. The Author is capable of conceiving history both as sequential and as simultaneous. The Author desires that man know also timelessness, that he wants to bring about an age of simultaneity. Indeed, he is all powerful, and this branch of the cult celebrates the comet as sign of his immutable will. They visualize the Book as something like a Great Novel, which ever, purposefully, seeks its own end. The comet, says this cult, will bring about the climax and denouement that will not only end the book, but make it complete and meaningful. After this completion, time will be no more and humanity will live in the eternal present. The Book will have achieved its goal of being finished, enclosed, and circular. This is the most vocal and noticeable of the cult's factions. Frequently, you see them dancing in circles, the circle symbolizing the comet's orbit.

Q: All these factions prophesy as crucial the efforts of one man at the end of time, do they not? A sort of Messiah, a symbol of the age?

A: Yes. But it's not known whether his efforts will save the earth from the comet, or destroy it. Only the first and last of these factions regard the actions of this Messiah--or doomsday man--as crucial: only their metaphysics provides for any sort of meaningful human action.

According to the last group the Messiah will apotheosize the spirit of the age. As man is a textual creature, so this avatar will be the apotheosis of textuality, right down to his name. He may be insane, but in him is the union of opposites. Thus he may not be so much the embodiment of the age as the avante-garde of the new one, at the forefront of a humanity struggling forth into a new consciousness. He more than any other man is invested with divine knowledge of the coming timeless age. Yet he understands it imperfectly. This imperfection, indeed, is what precipitates the action that brings on the new age. This Messiah seems to labor and pull with invisible strings something immeasurably heavy and static, as if his efforts, and the chaos of the final hours, are the birth struggle of the eternal present.

Q: Given the prophecy, and the nearness of the comet, this individual walks among us at this very time, does he not?

A: He has to. But none among the cult know his identity. It's rumored that a group, about which virtually nothing is known, has attempted, or will attempt, to find this individual, and use him to their ends.

Q: Which means that the group is of the first faction, the one believing that something must be done about the comet.

A: Quite correct. This is the only group that could, theoretically, employ this . . . avatar.

The interview proceeded, but at this point Wakeman's doorbell rang.

It was Gabriel, carrying a pair of binoculars. "Hurry," he said. "Where's your best view of the rock-face?"

"This way," replied Wakeman, guiding the director through the circular apartment to his living room window. "What's going on?"

"We may be about to be rid of that glare coming from the side of the mountain. Diana just called and said that Daniel took off up the mountain with a shovel and pick-axe." Gabriel raised the binoculars. "There he is," he said. "Working away." He handed the binoculars to Wakeman.

It was true. There was a man high up the mountain, struggling around the lower edges of the boulder that had completed the rock-face. As he watched, the man jumped back and the boulder began to move. Wakeman gave the binoculars back to Gabriel. "Hurry," he said. "It's rolling."

Binoculars were hardly necessary to see the boulder now rolling down the mountain through the rubble. It

rolled a short ways and came to rest on top of what had been a house.

"Why is he doing this?" said Wakeman. "Dislodging boulders, jumping off bridges, and all that?"

"Who knows?" replied Gabriel. "The man is insane. He spends most of his time now on the upper slopes, creeping home only occasionally for food, like a half-wild cat."

The two men backed away from the window and sat down.

"A hell of a run, last night," said Gabriel. "Sorry to have involved you. I owe you."

"You look to have escaped unscathed," replied Wakeman.

"Just barely. I hid in the back seat of a car. I overheard one of them telling the others to call off the hunt, that they'd picked up the book off the square."

"Are you still angry at me, for not being frank about the book?" said Wakeman.

"No. I apologize. It's just that it's been so frustrating, and with that damn Arswine there, who has physically bullied his way into this project. . . . But, as Diana pointed out to me, without you we wouldn't have had the first two fragments to work with, or what we've managed to come up with on the script."

"What was the fragment you had last night about?"

said Wakeman. "I never got past my name."

"Unfortunately, neither did I. Before that there was a descriptive passage like the ones that have begun *Substratas One and Three*."

"Where did you get it?"

"Daniel. And if he said where he got it, I sure couldn't tell!"

"Frankly, Gabriel, I don't know if I can be of much more help to you. All I can think about right now is the Paul Fourier up there."

"Ah, the impostor."

"I'm not sure that's the right word. Impostor though he may be, it's too small a word."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you read that book review?"

"I did, last night, but with everything else going on . . . I guess it just didn't sink in."

"The review was written several months ago," said Wakeman, "about a book that had just been published. That is, several months ago, several months before the comet went off course, Paul Fourier wrote a novel which was set during the approach of the comet. In the *Circular Gardens*, the planet faces apocalypse from the comet. Today, several months after the novel's publication, the planet faces apocalypse from the comet."

"Well, there has to be some explanation. Some wild coincidence, something rational."

"A few days ago I would have said the same thing," said Wakeman, getting up and pacing to the window. "But now. . . . There seems to be some unnatural correspondence of that novel to the times."

"Well, maybe Fourier will shortly be hailed as a prophet. Depending, of course, whether the novel bypasses the earth or not."

Wakeman was looking out the window at the clock tower. On the square below, the old man was creeping out of the alley. "It could be that: maybe he is a prophet, though in a much more complete way than you imply. Only I can't decide if the book is prophecy, and therefore mimicking, somehow across the gulf of time, current events, or if the relationship isn't something even more mysterious. Somehow I get the feeling that the novel is *driving* current events. If it's the latter, it's almost as if Fourier is engineering circumstances to fit his novel."

"I believe there is a popular expression: 'it's either ahead of the curve or behind it.'"

Wakeman was starting to pace the room now. "Somehow I believe that Fourier is a far more important man than we suppose. He is the Fourier computer fortune heir, you know, and the computer that controls the transit

system--and who knows what else in this city--is a *Fourier* B2000."

"Last night you almost had me convinced that you yourself were Fourier. Now you're talking about him in the third person."

"I was Paul Fourier long enough to write a book," replied Wakeman. "I may even have begun another book, titled *The Circular Gardens*, as Paul Fourier. But there's no way I could have written a whole novel and forgotten it, no matter how long ago I wrote it. This whole thing is too complex to bear my fingerprints."

"Except that there is a certain fingerprint in the book and it has a name: Wakeman."

"Right," replied Wakeman. "Obviously, somehow I *am* implicated. But how? How?"

A pause. "Well," sighed Gabriel at last. "You said you had another fragment for me to look at."

Wakeman left the room, retrieved the fragment from his file cabinet, returned to the living room and handed it to Gabriel. The director read a few minutes, then tossed the fragment onto the couch beside him.

Wakeman raised his eyebrows. "More of the same, isn't it?"

"More description, more description, and more description. A few lines of ambiguous interaction. None of

it goes anywhere, none of it gives me any idea where this script should go. You seem to have reached a higher degree of understanding today. Any suggestions?"

"In the first place," said Wakeman, "I'm sure you no longer need me."

"Oh? Why is that?"

"Just look around. Your subject matter is all around you. Just reach out and make a film about it."

"Let me get this straight," said Gabriel, sitting forward. "You are proposing that I use what's happening now as a model for the film script."

"Essentially, yes. The review does say the novel is set under the threat of a renegade comet, remember."

"A man named Inman wanders the city under the shadow of a comet, amidst steadily accumulating evidence that life is being orchestrated by a mysterious figure in the Mount Immanuel Mansion."

"Well, that's still not much to go on, I guess," replied Wakeman. "But until we find out who the novelist up there is, we may never write a complete script. We'll just go around in circles. Which brings me to a proposal. I want to try to go to that estate up there. I'll need someone to go with me. We could hire Daniel to guide us across the rubble. . . ."

He trailed off when he saw the uneasy look come

across Gabriel's face. "What is it?"

"I wasn't going to tell you this just yet," said Gabriel. "That is, until I could make sure whether you got the same invitation. . . ."

"Invitation? What invitation?"

"Well, I guess that you didn't get one. I'll have to tell you anyway. It seems that I've been invited to Fourier's estate tonight."

"What!"

The director was rummaging around in his pockets. "Here. I got this in the mail this morning." He handed Wakeman an envelope.

Wakeman tore into the envelope and took out a card. The card read

Paul Fourier wishes the pleasure of your company this Saturday evening for a ball marking the end of Festival. The old tramway to the summit of Mount Immanuel has been repaired and will begin boarding guests at nine P.M.

So this was why Gabriel was so happy. "The tramway?" said Wakeman. "That tramway hasn't worked in years. It hasn't run since long before the earthquake, since the estate was last abandoned!"

"Nevertheless, it is being opened. Its isolation in this ruined sector has protected it from news coverage. Diana's father told me that something has been going on

for weeks now. He knew that the tramway was being worked on--he even helped clear rubble off a section of it--but he had no idea that it would be opened this soon."

"Excuse me a minute," said Wakeman. He walked out of the apartment and checked his mailbox. There was no sign of an invitation.

"Damn it!" he said when returning. Gabriel turned from the window, holding the binoculars. "I had would have hoped that that Monsieur Arget I told you about would have gotten me an invitation along with yours." Wakeman paused. "Of course, he may not be responsible for yours. Fourier may have invited you because of the film."

"That's possible," said Gabriel. "Diana got an invitation too. But I would suggest that you meet me at nine at the tramway station. Maybe we can get you on without an invitation."

Wakeman got to the station early. It was being kind to call it a station, in reality. The old station-house remained closed, and a part of its roof was still in ruins. A single transit car, however, sat freshly painted on the tracks. And the tracks appeared in good repair and free of rubble as far up the mountain as Wakeman could see. The tracks were visible for a long ways, even though it was night time. The comet, looming now overhead, lit

the mountainside with the power of a second full moon.

Wakeman hoped he would spot Monsieur Arget at the station. But if he was here, he was in costume, as were most of the waiting crowd of about thirty.

Just before nine Wakeman saw Gabriel and Diana walking down the street that led from the director's house in a higher sector of Mount Immanuel. The wind had started to blow ferociously, and it blew open Gabriel's overcoat as the director strode down the incline.

Diana hung back, silent and barely acknowledging Wakeman. Wakeman had gotten used to such aloofness by now, liked it even: the more Diana withdrew from the world the better.

"We'll see if we can get you on in a minute, old man," said Gabriel.

At the stroke of nine a security guard walked up and unlocked the transit car and rolled back the car's door. Then he took up station just outside the door and, as the guests walked up, began collecting invitations. Guests filed into the car.

"Damn," muttered Wakeman to Gabriel. "I'll not be able to get on."

"We'll try," said Gabriel.

"But if you're not able to go, what will you do?" said Diana. Her first words that evening.

"Try to clear up my personal mystery as much as possible," said Wakeman. "You remember the issue of my twin? I think I'll have a little drive into the country tomorrow."

"What?" said Gabriel.

"It's too long and complicated to tell you right now," replied Wakeman, who saw that there were just two more people in line in front of Gabriel. "Diana can tell you about it."

The guard took Gabriel's invitation and murmured "Welcome."

"I'd like to include this gentleman," said Gabriel. "He's my assistant. We're working on the film of Mr. Fourier's novel. I'm sure Mr. Fourier would like to meet him."

"Invitation?" said the guard.

"He doesn't have one," said Gabriel. "But I'm sure one is in the mail for him. . . ."

"I'm sorry," replied the guard. "But I'm instructed to admit no one without an invitation."

"But. . . ." began Gabriel.

"That's all right," said Wakeman, backing away. "Give my respects to Mr. Fourier. Remind him of our long association."

Gabriel gave Wakeman a strange smile, turned and

followed Diana into the car. Wakeman could see that Diana had already been seated and was looking at him through the window. The lights of the station glared in the window, and he could not see her clearly. Was she smiling wanly at him?

Wakeman turned and hurried up the street toward his apartment. But he did not feel like going home just yet. When he came to the alley that would take him home, he walked straight ahead, up the mountain. After a while, he came to a small ridge that jutted out from the mountain-side. Too steep for building, this promontory was free also of rubble. It appeared sterile compared to the ruined mountainside around it. He started to the top of it along a faint footpath.

From its summit Wakeman could see the forest of lights that was Bonneville, the dark mass of Mount Immanuel, and above it all, the brilliantly lit porticoes of Fourier's mansion. In the sky, clouds scudded at high speed under the moon, the comet. Wind roared and tugged at his coat and hair.

Raymond Fourier. Thomas Wakeman. Arthur Inman.

And tomorrow, a trip into his past.

What dark secret seeped out of this rubble, lurked on the mountaintop, resided, perhaps, in his ancestral village?

Wakeman looked up the mountain. Movement. A figure struggling downward, then climbing toward him.

At last, Daniel Eidle.

He walked up and stood next to Wakeman. His eyes, glistening with the light of the comet, burning through the night, fastened on Wakeman's. Then he looked up and fastened his gaze on the brilliant swath across the heavens.

"Don't come back," said Daniel, still upward-looking.

"What? Why?" said Wakeman. "What are you talking about?"

"The place you're going. Don't come back."

"Why, how do you know I'm going anywhere?" sputtered Wakeman.

The slender young man just stood there, his dark hair tossed by the wind roaring now over the rubble, his youthful face a mask of terror and . . . was it exultation? The moon and comet, alternately hidden and revealed by the racing clouds, splashed him with a light of steadily changing intensity.

"You can feel it, can't you?" said Daniel.

Wakeman looked over, trembling.

"It's up ahead," said Daniel. "You can feel it, hear it. It makes a sound, like something sucking. It's sucking us all along. A whirlpool, a vortex."

"What . . . what is it?" said Wakeman, breathlessly.

Daniel stepped up close, radiant. "Time," he whispered into Wakeman's ear, barely audibly. "It won't let go."

The mountain, the city, the sky, the rubble itself seemed thick with meaning, an almost material sensation. For an instant, it seemed to Wakeman that he glimpsed his fate, the true nature of his experience. Then everything went dark.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Substrata. II

In the city it is late afternoon, and the sun's rays, now nearly horizontal, cast the plaza in a chiaroscuro of light and shadow. Crowds are just now beginning to gather on the plaza for the evening's festivities. Vendors are putting up tents. Men are working on a stage. A few orators have perched themselves on the low wall around the square. The plaza is empty, as it will be until next year's Festival. The streets, which wind in intricate patterns from the square, which circle back to themselves, too are empty. Light from streetlamps reflects from pools of rainwater on their surface. The cathedral bells toll. The rain falls, and clouds block my view of the metropolis. The night is dry and clear, and around the plaza are concentric circles of lights: some are lamps marking the route of the circular transit system, others blaze from mansions in which costumed revelers of all description glide, on polished marble floors, to the accompaniment of bands and orchestras. I can see all of it very well from my study, this dim, ornate chamber lined with curtains, bookcases, and somber paintings.

Paintings. In times past I commissioned a painting of Inman and his journeys. Now it hangs in my study. It is the largest of my paintings, as it must encompass many

different events in Inman's life. In one corner there is Inman on the plaza, pressed upon by the reveling multitudes. In another Inman sits, surrounded by his physicians, in the great hospital. In another corner is Inman as he stands in the anterior chamber, looking at a door. The door is gold. The only other features of the room are a silver door and a red one. The red one is painted ambiguously, and is located at the far end of the room, which seems to imply that Inman is not yet ready to step through this door, not yet ready for the madness that awaits him on its other side.

The painting reminds me of that day that Inman wandered my mansion, of his course through my great corridors, of his entry into the anterior chamber.

That day Inman closed the gold door behind him and and looked for a while at the other two doors. Perhaps he was considering which door would provide the most likely access to the music now more audible than ever. After a moment, he chose the silver door.

As the door opened it probably seemed as if he were being struck by a blast of wind, such was the contrast between the carpeted silence of the the projection room earlier. It was music, however, not wind, that hit him. It was the sound of a grand piano. Inman stood rooted just outside the door, trying to see inside the room. It

was much darker in there, though, than the anterior chamber. The only light came from a small lamp far across the room, seemingly mounted on the piano, directly above the keyboard. All that Inman could possibly have seen, aside from a few keys, were the hands that were playing the keyboard. His view of the center of the keyboard must have been blocked by the implied human figure there. The figure's hands ran up and down the keyboard, now fortissimo, now pianissimo. Inman had heard the composition the hands played many times before, though now it was only a dim recollection. He stood in the doorway, listening, unable to move or speak to the performer.

At length he appeared about to announce his presence, then decided not to. He was no doubt unable to bring himself to interrupt the performer. The piece seemed to go on forever. After what seemed an hour, the performance wound down into a sequence of repeating, hypnotic figures, obviously an improvisation. There was no point in waiting for the end of the piece because there was no piece, and the performer might play on at length.

Inman backed out of the chamber and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Early Sunday morning Wakeman called and made reservations on the Air Transit System (ATS) to St. Yves, the nearest town with an airport to Key. He planned to rent a car in St. Yves and drive the forty or so miles on to Key.

Though Key was located beyond the Perimeter, according to the map it still existed. According to national census records Wakeman had tapped into through his computer, it had a population of 220. This was less than a tenth of the population it had when he was a boy, so the prospects of finding anyone who remembered him or his family were not good.

Still, it merited a try. Moreover, the trip would get him out of a city which seemed somehow lonelier than usual, and give him a sense of purpose that seemed somehow to have been evaporating since Gabriel and Diana boarded the train for Fourier's estate. The director had not called this morning, and Wakeman had gotten no answer when he phoned Gabriel's.

At about eight A.M. Wakeman left the apartment, walked down the hill to the transit station, and rode to the Crystal Palace, where he caught the Circle Seven line to the airport that lay on the other side of Mount Immanuel. An hour later he was in the air, and an hour after

that he had arrived in St. Yves, rented a car, and begun his drive to Key.

The map had not conveyed how isolated the village was. The two-lane highway took Wakeman through three small towns, all close together and all within fifteen miles of St. Yves. After the last village, he saw almost no settlement--just an isolated farm here and there.

The car seemed a capsule in which he sped through time. The closer he got to Key, the more it seemed that he was going back into the history of his life, and that that history had an almost material quality. If he could just read these hills . . . which seemed at times, just for an instant, to blur and shift into a single, unified cohesiveness, perhaps he could read in them the story of his life. . . . Ah, the landscape. . . . That's what they called these hills, these fields, woods and thickets that meant nothing by themselves. All together, they assumed a collective identity, something manageable, comprehensive, namable. But was "landscape" something they amounted up to, or was it something imposed upon them?

And all together, the images of his life were called a "life," a word as simplifying as "landscape." But what did that life mean? Why did he assume the cause and effect relationship between images that comprised a

"life?" What was the purpose of this trip? Would it merely top off a stream of images, on which he had imposed a certain order and called a "life?" Or would it force another interpretation on those images?

On the edge of all this was a certain fluidity of names. The landscape was not a landscape. Life was not a life. And suddenly all he saw and remembered was stripped of the meanings he had given it. "Landscape" was no longer possible. There were just hills--but no, not even that: the world was nameless. There were just . . . sights. These "sights" wanted to congeal, he thought, into a single, unified *product*, but the fact was that they stubbornly resisted such an urge. Indeed, all was *process*.

It was in such a frame of mind that at last Wakeman sped out of the hills and into a flat, desolate bottomland that seemed somewhat the prelude to a stinking miasma called a river, about a hundred yards across here, a mixture of brown and yellow. A little patch of unpainted buildings huddled together a ways from the river, presumably out of its flood plane.

The two-lane blacktop road had degenerated into a pitted and cracked strip of tar over which the rental car bounced and rattled. Wakeman drove past the hamlet, which a barely legible road sign announced was Hero, population

652. Just ahead was a narrow bridge, its rusty metal superstructure hulking above the river like the seasonally abandoned carapace of a giant departed insect. A small metal sign attached to the bridge bore the name Framing River. Barring Wakeman's entrance to the bridge was a roadblock made of several rusty metal barrels, all pocked with bullet holes. Across the front of the barrels was tacked a rotten wooden sign on which was inscribed, in faded black letters: Bridge Closed.

Wakeman stopped the car in the middle of the road, turned off the engine, and got out. There was no sign of traffic this side of the bridge or the other. Everything was quiet, except the swishing of the river and the incessant chattering of a host of invisible, chattering insects. Wakeman walked around the barrels and up onto the bridge. From there he could see that that the span had collapsed about halfway over the river. There were still two metal supports across the river, but the bridge looked too dangerous, too alien and hostile in its rusted metallic monstrosity to support a foot crossing.

Wakeman returned to the car, backed up until he could turn around, and sped back to Hero.

The only thing that did not disgust him immediately about the town was the presence of several large trees which spared the hamlet from the relentless sun of the

Perimeter region. He drove around the streets, hoping to find someone to ask about how to cross the river. Most of the unpainted houses seemed deserted, though in the dirt yards in front of two or three of them a few half-naked, dirty children played and a few flocks of scraggly chickens pecked around.

It didn't take Wakeman long to locate a store. There was no name printed anywhere on the building, which, like everything else in the village, was in sore need of paint; all he saw were two or three commercial logos so faded he could not make out what they had, at one time, advertised. Wakeman parked the car in front of the store by a gas pump and went inside. The interior was dark and cool.

"Help ye?" said a voice in what Wakeman recognized as the dialect of the region.

A rhythmic squeaking was coming from somewhere in the store. Wakeman looked around but could see no one at first. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, however, he saw something move behind a counter. On closer inspection he saw a man, tremendously fat, rocking in a rocking chair.

"Don't get up," Wakeman said, though the man was making no move to do so. "I didn't know the bridge was closed. What's the closest detour to Key?"

The man looked at Wakeman quizzically for a moment.

"Key, you say? Now why would you want to go there?" The voice was full of phlegm, as if hardly used, and inappropriately high-pitched.

Wakeman hardly saw that this was any of the man's business, but he replied, "I used to live there, and just wanted to look it over." As he replied, he began to wonder why indeed it was that he wished to go there, especially if it was anything like Hero.

"Used to live there? Must've been awful young when you did. Most everybody was gone ten, fifteen years ago."

"Gone? The population records say it has a population of two hundred and twelve."

"Well, the population records is wrong. Been deserted, more or less, since the bridge collapsed. Only way to it is a bridge fifty miles north of here, at St. Clair. Then you gottuh drive back down. Unless you can find the ferryman. But he don't make but two, three trips a day anymore. Not no traffic no more. Ain't no one dumb enough to drive past the Perimeter."

Wakeman had no intention of driving to St. Clair and back down to Key. That would be a hundred miles out of his way and would make the time available for looking around Key too brief: he had to fly back to Bonneville from St. Yves at five. It was nearly noon now: he had about three hours.

"Where do you think I could find this ferryman," Wakeman said.

"Down by the river, I'd expect," said the fat man. "Where else you think he'd be?"

"I just thought from what you'd said. . . " Wakeman began, but stopped when he realized being disputatious with such a creature was futile. He nodded thanks and walked out of the store, slamming the screen door behind him.

It took him only minutes to drive through the hamlet to the river, seconds more to find what he was looking for: a dangerously tilting board structure land-side of a parody of a pier. At the end of the pier floated what appeared to be a small barge, parallel and attached to a tub-like, grimy vessel Wakeman assumed was a tug boat.

Wakeman parked the car and walked past the shack out onto the pier, trying to discover if it was strong enough to support the rental car. He walked to the end and jumped down onto the barge. He saw nobody. Then he walked to the end of the barge and looked out over the river. It seemed more swollen now, a bit more yellowish. It also stank more here. No doubt the town's sewage was pumped raw into the river.

Wakeman was about to turn around and walk back to the river bank when he noticed a movement on the far shore.

It was woman, waving at him from the other bank. She was standing in front of an ancient black automobile, shaking a brightly colored handkerchief at him. As he watched, she turned and got back into the car, on the passenger side.

Then he heard the boards of the pier creaking. The sound startled Wakeman: he whirled around feeling guilty, as if he'd been caught looking into someone else's secret. Coming to meet him was a man, limping along the boards. He was middle-aged, stout and bald. The butt of an unlit cigar, wet with saliva, poked from his mouth.

"Just pull her on board," said the man without preamble. "It'll cost you three bucks."

"Yes, I'm going to Key," said Wakeman.

"That'll be your doing," said the man. "I'm just taking ye across the river. Three bucks." He held out his hand.

Wakeman paid the man and got back into the car, preparing to pull it on board. But then the man waved his hand and ambled up to the car window.

"Say you're goin to Key?"

"Yes."

"Goin any further?"

"Hadn't planned to."

"Well, everything in Key is walking distance from the

pier, easy," said the man. "You can see it all from here." He pointed to a line of unpainted buildings on the far shore. "If I was you I'd just leave your car here. That way, you won't have to worry about gettin it back on this ferry-boat. If someone else should be drivin over, you might get left out. This boat'll only carry one car at a time nowadays, and if someone beats you to the ramp you'll be stranded. And I ain't making no extra trips today."

"Sounds like good advice," said Wakeman, starting the car and preparing to move it to a mud parking area to the side of the wharf.

"It'll still cost you three bucks," said the man, walking off.

Wakeman boarded the hulk and watched as the man started up the tug and guided the barge slowly away from the river bank, a column of thick black smoke belching from a tube on its roof. A young boy was on board, assisting the man in the cabin. After a minute he came out of the cabin and moved cautiously Wakeman's way, looking at him suspiciously. An old dog followed close on his heels.

Wakeman decided to be friendly. "There was an old woman on the other bank, waving," he said.

"Yeah, that's that old furrin woman. She comes in

every week or so to get stuff from the store. Old bitch."

Wakeman said nothing in reply, being taken aback by the boy's language. He moved onward, to the rear of the barge, and adjusted something.

Then Wakeman heard the sound of liquid squirting nearby. He looked around and saw that the dog was urinating on a post at the corner of the barge.

Disheartened by the dismal reception he had gotten in his native territory, Wakeman moved to the front of the barge so as to be able to alight from it quickly.

At length the boat neared the other bank and the pilot maneuvered the barge to a landing. Here the accommodations were even more meager. The dock seemed just a few boards fitted awkwardly together. In a muddy area carved out of the bank by car tires sat the old vehicle Wakeman had seen from the other side. Both a man and a woman sat inside.

The boy had thrown a looped rope over a post. As soon as Wakeman saw the barge had docked, he prepared to jump off. But just as he was about to jump, the old car on the river bank accelerated and with a whoosh deposited itself on board the barge. Wakeman had to run to the end of the barge to keep from being run over. He found himself wedged between the car and the end of the barge. The way around the vehicle on both sides was too narrow and

rotten-looking to risk.

The boy ran off the tug-boat and onto the barge. "What thuh hell you think yore doin, you god dam idiot," he yelled. "Back that piece of shit off this here barge so's this man can git off!"

But the car did not move. The boy started yelling again, and Wakeman could see the woman making gestures to the driver. In response, the driver just sat there, a look of confusion on his face.

The tug boat captain had come out of his cabin. "Aw, shut up, he'd back the shitten thang into the river anyhow." He strode up to the driver's door and opened it. "Move over, there, Howard," he said. "I'll do the backin on this fuckin boat."

The engine roared. Then the tires shrieked on the wooden surface of the barge and there were splinters flying around. For a moment Wakeman thought that the captain, confused by the operation of an unfamiliar vehicle, had made a mistake and was about to wreck the car. But suddenly the old black auto was sitting back on the shore, its engine idling loudly. The captain got out and motioned Wakeman onward.

Before Wakeman could alight, the captain motioned him to a stop and said, "Normly Mizzez Spazky gits her shoppin and visitin done in about an hour. That'll probably be

the last trip of the day, unless someone's decided to come over from Wartburg or down from Spencer."

"You mean I've got to meet you here in an hour?"

"If you wanta get back today, you do. Last trip of the day."

"But it's still early."

"It's also Sunday. Last trip of the day."

Wakeman jumped out onto the landing and then walked onto a narrow blacktop road. Small patches of grass and weeds grew through cracks in it. After stopping to watch the ferry depart, he started down the road into the unpainted town.

In minutes Wakeman was walking through a village in even worse repair than Hero. The streets, arranged in a grid, led him by one deserted house after another. Most of them--great, unpainted ramshackle dwellings with big front porches--sat under stands of immense trees. Trash and abandoned autos and machinery littered their front lawns.

The central part of town, which was organized around a square containing the city hall, was similarly deserted. The city hall itself seemed to be collapsing: a tree had fallen over one wing and caved in the roof and most of a wall. The grounds around the building seemed to have been used as a junkyard at one time. There were several rust-

ing cars squatting amidst patches of high grass and weeds.

The buildings around the square had formerly been businesses. Now their fronts were smashed and gaping. Broken glass littered the weed-choked sidewalks in front of them. One whole block seemed to have burned: great masses of charred debris were piled up beside the blackened remnants of a several burned trees.

Wakeman was amazed at the condition of the town. He had not been back since he left as a child, and had no idea that it had been deserted and left to rot. In another twenty, thirty years, the village would be only a memory: no one would come here any more, and nature would have completed the process of reclamation already so obviously in process.

After walking for about fifteen minutes, Wakeman started detecting movements around him. A rustle here, a piece of debris falling there, sounds of scurrying. Then he began to see cats. One came out from an abandoned building several feet in front of him: it hadn't seen Wakeman; now it crouched, muscles taut, its yellow eyes burning at Wakeman with a mixture of fear and predatory appraisal. This cat's appearance seemed to be the signal for the appearance of others. After a while, they were all around, some looking down at Wakeman from the gaping holes of second and third story windows, some lounging in

the grass at the side of the square, two or three at a time streaking in front of him like powerful little packets of racing muscle. After a while the town seemed filled with their sounds and motions, scurryings, mewings, hissings, and burning stares.

Wakeman left the village's abandoned business district and started toward the area in which he had lived as a child. He by-passed two of the residential streets on the side of town opposite his entry and turned down the final one.

There it was. At the end of the street, just as he'd remembered. A two-story structure, frame like the rest of the town, fairly intact. A big porch the length of the house.

Wakeman picked his way cautiously through the weeds in the front yard and surveyed the front porch.

The steps had disintegrated, but the porch itself looked fairly sound. Wakeman grasped a pole and hauled himself up onto the cracking boards, careful not to get splinters. Then he walked carefully across the porch to the door. It was part-way open, but the wood had expanded with moisture to the point that he had to force it open--making a loud creaking sound--far enough to enter.

The entrance hall was dark, being lit only by way of the front door. A staircase reached into the darkness

above. Wakeman passed it and followed the entrance hall toward the rear of the house, where it ended in the dining room. There, a big window looked out on the backyard, which looked completely overgrown: tangled branches spread everywhere. From the dining room Wakeman entered the kitchen, which was empty of appliances. All the cupboard doors stood open. There were some old jars of what looked to have been jelly long ago. The linoleum floor was cracked and peeling, and covered with a layer of dirt. On an L-shaped counter in a corner of the kitchen was what looked like a stick. As Wakeman moved further into the room, it moved too. Wakeman froze while the snake, which had been sunning itself in the light shining through the window, slithered into a hole at the juncture of counter and window.

In revulsion, Wakeman returned to the living room. Here there were two or three pieces of rotting furniture, coated with inches of dust. Wakeman backed out of the room into the entrance hall and regarded the stairs that led to his old bedroom. Carefully, he began his ascent.

Despite numerous numerous cracking and creaking noises, the stairs held, and Wakeman was soon standing in his old room. Strange how small it looked, he thought. Now the wallpaper, whose patterns he did not remember, was peeling in large sections from the wall. The ceiling was

partially rotted away, and an exposed light fixture dangled from it.

Suddenly there was a noise from the other side of the room. Wakeman froze. A movement in the window. Was it a shadow? No, it was a large bird, wedged between the disintegrating window shade and the glass. Wakeman walked cautiously over. An owl. It looked at Wakeman through its huge, unblinking eyes. Wakeman reached slowly over the creature and pulled on the window, which, after considerable effort and creaking, was raised far enough for the owl, flapping silently its wings, to fly free and sail into some neighboring trees.

There was no point in looking through the ruined homestead any further. Wakeman walked from the room and down the stairs and out of the alien dwelling. He could hardly believe he had once lived there.

As he walked out into the front yard, Wakeman heard a horn honking in the distance. The ferry had returned so soon? He took off at a run for the wharf.

As he rounded the last turn in the road before approaching the river, he saw the old black auto coming at him. The driver was taking up most of both lanes, and Wakeman had to jump into the ditch at the side of the road to avoid being hit.

And when he reached the landing, he saw that the boat

had already departed, smoke again belching from its stack.

What would he do now? Perhaps he would have to make an attempt at walking the bridge. Wakeman looked after the ferry in despair. Could the bridge even be attempted? Surely he could not be expected to spend the night in this abandoned hamlet. Whatever his future course of action, however, he had first to find a resident of the town, to ask about his family. Otherwise his mission would be a total failure.

Wakeman turned and walked back toward his old home. Surely there would be someone close by who could tell him something, even if it was incomplete. But as he walked down the street, he saw that no one could possibly be living in the houses that lined it.

It took several minutes more before he found what appeared an inhabited dwelling. It was on a street parallel to the one he had lived on, and down a block. In its front yard was the old black automobile that had run him off the road and nearly off the ferry. Its hood was open, and there was someone leaning over the fender, their top half down in the engine compartment.

Wakeman walked up the front steps of the dilapidated old building and knocked on the door. In seconds a woman appeared behind the screen. She wore a black dress, which blended in so with the dark interior of the house that

Wakeman could make out only her face. The face had a pasty-white complexion, and exhibited an expression of mild perplexity.

"Good afternoon," said Wakeman. "My name is Thomas Wakeman. I lived in this town about thirty years ago. I'm just searching for someone who might be able to tell me about the Wakemans who used to live here."

Had the woman's eyes lit up with a slight spark of recognition? Slowly, Wakeman began to feel he'd met the woman before. Spazky, the ferryman had called her.

"I know you don't remember me, Mrs. Spazky. But when I was a little boy, I used to live a block over. Did you live here thirty or more years ago?"

"Why yes, I did," said the woman. She hesitated, then said, "Won't you come in?"

Wakeman walked into the dark foyer, where a stairway disappeared upwards into the gloom. He followed the woman to a living room, heavily furnished, some of the furnishings betraying signs of past elegance. The room was stiflingly hot: in spite of the heat outside, a small fire licked in the fireplace.

"Would you care for a glass of tea?" inquired the old woman.

"Yes, I would. Thanks." replied Wakeman. The woman walked out of the room and left Wakeman with the thread-

bare furniture and the old grandfather clock which ticked ominously in a corner.

The woman returned with a glass of iced tea.

"Thanks," Wakeman said, taking a sip. He had not realized how thirsty he was. The climate along the Perimeter was much hotter than that of Bonneville, cooled as that city was by coastal winds and moisture.

"Please sit down," said the woman. Then, after a pause, "The Wakemans, did you say?"

"That's right, Mrs. Spazky," said Wakeman. "Do you remember them?"

The woman hesitated. "Weren't they killed in an auto accident?"

"Yes, they were," said Wakeman. "That happened about thirty years ago. I was about nine at the time. Unfortunately, I don't remember much about them, or about Key."

"Well, that's understandable," replied the woman in a quiet voice. "You were taken to an orphanage in Bonneville. . . ."

"That's exactly right!" exclaimed Wakeman, delighted at the woman's accuracy and wanting to encourage more of it.

"I always regretted that," she said. "Losing both your parents, and having no family."

"Well, I've done pretty well since," said Wakeman,

relaxing into the chair. "I'm a professor at the University, and I've written a few books."

"That's nice," said the woman. "I'm glad things turned out well for you."

A pause. "What I've come for, Mrs. Spazky, is to try to find someone to tell me about my real parents," said Wakeman. "Would you happen to remember anything about them?"

The woman's face shadowed over with doubt. "I don't know that it is proper to reveal. . ." she began. "But I guess now that everyone involved, except you, of course, has passed on, there's no harm."

Wakeman was now on the edge of his seat. But then there came an interruption. A door slammed and there were steps in another section of the house. Then a small oriental man of rather advanced years walked into the room. Wakeman recognized him as the woman's driver, the one who had run him off the road and nearly off the ferry. His clothes, hands and face were stained with grease. He looked around the room with a quick, appraising gaze, the expression on his heavily lined face one of benevolent calculation.

"Sig," he croaked, hurrying towards Wakeman. "Sig."

Wakeman retreated in alarm. "What's he saying?"

"He speaks and understands very little English," said

the woman. "He wants a cigarette."

The little man gave Wakeman a heavily stubbled smile and held out his hand. "I'm afraid I don't smoke," said Wakeman.

Mrs. Spazky rose and walked to the mantle, where she drew a cigarette out of a box and gave it to the man.

"His name is Howard," said the old lady. "He is my mechanic."

"Your mechanic!" Wakeman said. "You mean he is capable. . . ."

The little man was hurrying around the room, a cigarette dangling from his lips. He came up to Wakeman, his face muscles working this way and that. At last he walked over to the fireplace, bent down and lit his cigarette from the fire.

"My mechanic and chauffeur," the woman said.

Wakeman recovered after a few moments. "Well, I'm taking up your time. But I wonder if I could ask you just a few more questions."

"Of course," said Mrs. Spazky, smiling.

"Could you tell me what you know about my real parents, the ones before the Wakemans?"

The woman sat erect on the front of her chair. She looked regretful. "It was a sad case. The girl was so young, and unmarried. And then she died only a month or

so after childbirth."

"I'm sorry to hear that my biological mother died," said Wakeman in measured tones. "But can you tell me if perhaps she had twins?"

The woman looked startled for an instant. "Why, no. There were no twins. Just one. Just little Arthur. But of course you've changed your name. . . ."

"You're sure," said Wakeman, disappointed. "No twins."

"Oh, yes."

Still, Wakeman was not satisfied. He would search census records from his computer back home, if he had a little more information. "Do you remember the name of the young woman who gave birth to me?"

"Oh. Yes. Maria. Maria Inman."

Wakeman shot up from his chair. "Maria who?"

The woman looked alarmed. "Inman. Maria Inman. Is something wrong?"

"Well, I. . . . What did you say the child's first name was?"

"Arthur. Arthur Inman. He was named. . . ."

Wakeman walked up to the woman. "How . . . how do you know that?" he said shakily.

"Why, the Inmans lived right across the street. Maria lived with her parents. Are you all right?"

Wakeman had collapsed on the chair and was staring off into space. A minute later he looked at the woman.

"And you are absolutely certain there were no twins?"

"Why, no. I mean, yes. I mean, I can't be absolutely certain, of course. Who can? After all, I was only a neighbor. But I never heard anything about a twin."

Wakeman rose again. "Thank you, Mrs. Spazky. You've been very helpful. But I wonder if you could tell me how to get across the river to Hero."

"Well, there's the ferry. . . ."

"I mean, other than the ferry. Is it possible to walk across that ruined bridge?"

"Well, I guess it's possible, but not safe," replied the woman, rising from her chair. "But it would be better to take a boat. Now, I keep a small motorboat down at the pier in case of emergency. Howard could take you."

Fifteen minutes later Wakeman followed a waddling Howard onto the pier and and into a small boat. After several tries, the man started the motor and then the boat began slowly across the river. The only other craft on the river was a huge barge, heading down the estuary, probably with a cargo of minerals from a mine that Wakeman seemed to remember was located several miles upriver.

About halfway across, Wakeman noted that the boat was on a collision course with the barge. In fact, the two

vessels were suddenly alarmingly close.

He looked behind at Howard. "Turn away from that barge," he said. But the man just smiled. "Circle away from that barge," repeated Wakeman, slower this time.

"Suckel," said the man, smiling. "Eveverything want to be suckel. The wuld, the planet, the sun, all want to be suckel."

And still he did not change course. Wakeman rose suddenly and made his way to the rear of the craft and, shoving Howard roughly out of the way, took control of the motor. And just in time, for the hull of barge towered over the boat now like a high battlement. Wakeman jerked the craft around, missing the barge by only a few feet.

But this action was not enough to avert disaster. As the barge slipped by, it created a powerful whirlpool behind it, and then the boat was swirling madly around, sideways. Howard chose this time to try to move to the front of the boat. In doing so, he nearly fell overboard. In fact, he would have if Wakeman had not jumped up and grabbed him. Left without a rudder, the boat became even more riotously unstable, so much so that Wakeman himself was pitched overboard. He felt himself being sucked into the whirlpool: his last sight of Howard was the little man sitting again, somehow, at the motor, steering the craft

away from the whirlpool, its prow pointed in the direction it had come.

On a hot summer afternoon several miles from the sea, a man crawled out of a river onto a rocky outcropping. He lay exhausted there for a while, but then sat up, leaned against a boulder, and looked down the broad estuary to the limitless ocean. At length he rose to go, but had a sudden urge to immortalize his landing. He picked up a rock and worked for a few minutes on the boulder, etching his initials, then moved back to view his handiwork.

What he saw were initials far deeper than he could have etched them in a hundred years.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Wakeman strode into his apartment, changed clothes still damp from his swim, hurried into his living room and flicked on his computer. After the instrument had warmed up he went through a sequence of commands that linked him to the national census records. A few more commands called up the records of births in his home province. A few more narrowed the search down to the hospital in which he was born. Finally he typed in his birthdate. There were two babies born that day. They were

Levesque, Helen. Female. Parents: Levesque, Charles
Alain; Levesque, Karen Joan Samples

Inman, Arthur. Parents: Inman, Maria Keller.

Quickly, Wakeman looked through the surrounding birthdates, hoping to find a record of the birth of a baby boy who might have been later renamed Wakeman, Thomas. He had no success, of course. There were baby boys born in the small, rural hospital on most of the dates he searched, but how could he tell if one had been renamed Thomas Wakeman? The adoption files were no doubt blocked to the general public.

All evidence pointed to his birth, forty years be-

fore, as Arthur Inman.

The entire trip home, he had hoped that Mrs. Spazky had made a mistake and, even if there had not been twins born to Maria Inman, at least another baby had been born the same day that might have been him. But his investigations had been brought to a halt at a blank stone wall.

Moreover, any further search would be grasping at straws. Evidence also pointed to the fact that he had begun a novel about a man named Arthur Inman. Though that novel had grown into something alien and frightening, and though it had now uncertain relation to him, the coincidence was just too much to assume away. Perhaps there would be resolution later on that would explain everything, but he saw not one wisp of its outline.

The trip to Key had been a failure, then. Not only had he failed utterly to find any evidence of a twin, he had linked himself even more inextricably with this abominable novel. Who would have thought that in the small rural village of his birth, so remote from the confusing metropolis and its Festival, its novelists and film directors, that in a place so simple and straightforward, he would find such compelling evidence?

He was Arthur Inman.

Maddening!

Wakeman jumped up from the computer and raced over to

his telephone answering machine. Perhaps Gabriel had called. Ah yes! The red light was on. Wakeman reversed the tape and then played back his messages. There were two. The first was from Roberta: "Thomas, would you please meet me at the Plaza Cafe today at four? It's at the corner of Pilotte and Broadfaith. I'll be there until McKenzie speaks at five. It's important. I want to clear something up." The second caller failed to identify himself: "You came home. Don't go out." The garbled voice was that of Daniel. What did the young man mean telling him not to come back, telling him to stay at home?

The Festival was over, yet you would never know it, thought Wakeman, except that, apart from a few disoriented stragglers, no one wore a costume. The crowd was huge, bigger than any Wakeman had seen on the immense plaza, this square which dwarfed even the major structures around its border: the Cathedral, the Metropolitan Museum, the Provincial House of Government, the old Bonneville Castle, all the most imposing and expansive of buildings.

The size of the crowd was hardly surprising, of course, given McKenzie's immense popularity. In the Crystal Palace, Wakeman had bought a paper while waiting for the train that would carry him to the Plaza. The headline had screamed

McKenzie To Sweep Elections

and the subsequent article had cited polls that showed McKenzie's party to be twenty points ahead of the nearest opposition.

After leaving the Plaza South station, Wakeman tried to skirt the crowd to its rear--it was still thick here, though, and Wakeman was continually having to avoid running into people. A myriad of coincidences, he thought.

It seemed after a while that the words *The Circular Gardens* were on the lips of every third or fourth person he met. Here he heard "circle," there he heard "gardens." "A sparkling work of imagination," said a woman. Sometimes he thought he heard "Fourier," and "Gabriel." One time he distinctly heard someone call "Wakeman!" He turned around, expecting to see someone waving to him in the crowd. But of course it had been his imagination: there was no one. Was he hearing voices again? A *universe of significations*, McX--Fourier--had said.

Wakeman had left the plaza and had walked to the front door of the cafe where Roberta was waiting. What could she want? In all the excitement, he had nearly forgotten about her, as if she was a useless relic of a life he'd abandoned. Wakeman checked his watch: three fifty. He opened the door and walked in.

Roberta was nowhere in sight. Wakeman found a booth

to the rear of the cafe and sat down. A waitress came by and he ordered a cup of coffee. While he waited he checked the pockets of the old jacket he had put on after discarding the wet one. He pulled out several scraps of paper. He looked with a combination of amazement and exasperation at the notes written on the scraps in his own hand.

Fourier arrives in B. Looks down on city. Describes city.

Fourier describes Inman.

Walks in large hall. Hears footsteps. Vase.

Mental Ward.

The last note was dated. It was dated several years before, long before Fourier's *The Circular Gardens* had been published.

Mentally, Wakeman threw up his hands, then he lit the scraps one by one and left them to burn in the ashtray.

Then he heard Roberta. "Thomas, what are you doing? Making sacrifices to the muses?"

Wakeman had sat down facing the rear wall, and had not seen her come in. He looked up in surprise. There was someone with her: Wharton. It was enough to be burdened with Roberta at a time like this, but why Wharton too?

Wharton and Roberta sat down across from Wakeman.

Roberta was making a big commotion about getting seated, looking up at him closely, smiling as she talked.

"Thomas, I just want to get something resolved," she was saying. "Thomas, I just want you to know that Peter is not your enemy. He wants you to know it too. You have much in common, you know." Here Wharton stuck his hand across the table. Wakeman took it limply in his own, staring. Roberta continued. "Thomas, I told Peter of your preoccupations with coincidence. He was amazed! It seems that he has the same worry! I think you both are crazy (she laughed), but there's no reason why two crazies can't be friends. Especially if you have the same psychoses! You're soul brothers!"

Wakeman jerked his hand away from Wharton's. "Yecchhh!" he exclaimed, jerking backwards. Roberta's face was a startled mask; Wharton's was unreadable. Wakeman scrambled out of his seat and fled out the door.

It was in a black mood indeed that Wakeman found himself walking furiously, with no destination in mind, in the twisted quarters surrounding the plaza. Shadows were deepening; crowds and autos buzzed around without motivation. On a corner, a small group of young people with shaved heads danced in a circle. Each grasped a rattling object in his hand which he or she shook back and forth in

rhythm to the dance. Wakeman skirted around the dancers and wandered off down a narrow street shadowed on both sides, and as far as he could see, with four and five story stone buildings. People looked out every window, it seemed, and hung over balconies. Music blared from some windows; from others he could hear newscasts. The name McKenzie was audible every yard, and sometimes he could hear "novel," and "Circular" and "Gardens." And the scratching sound the dancers had made with their shakers seemed to follow him. He picked up speed until he was almost running.

Wakeman came to a stop at an intersection when he saw Daniel Eidle across the street. He stopped in amazement that he should run across the young man in this teeming quarter near the plaza. While standing, virtually paralyzed at the sight of Daniel, he saw the young man stop, look around, then proceed cautiously around a corner.

As if hypnotized, Wakeman started after Daniel. He walked across the street (car horns blaring at him) and stopped at the corner, around which he too crept, peering around. A half block ahead, he caught sight of Daniel's blue jacket as he weaved through the crowd. Then the jacket veered off the street. Wakeman came up to where he had last seen Daniel; the young man must have walked into an alley. Wakeman stopped and peered around

the corner. Daniel was standing a hundred feet or so away. He looked around once more, then opened a door and walked into an ancient, dilapidated building, closing the door behind him without a sound.

What was the young man up to? Wakeman felt himself suddenly obsessed with Daniel's actions. It was, of course, the height of absurdity to flee down the street from one coincidence only to get entangled in another, but Wakeman felt almost physically drawn after Daniel. If this scratching sound, which had its source in those blasted objects the dancers had been shaking, would only stop, he could start reasoning again. But the rhythmic shaking intensified every second, and soon it seemed that all the insects in the world were scratching in unison, and it seemed that the rhythm was extending to his vision: the city seemed to waver in and out of focus with each scratch.

Before he knew it, Wakeman had followed Daniel into the building. Another door, this one locked. The only alternative was to climb a staircase. Doors locked at floors two and three. On the fourth floor, the door unlocked. Wakeman opened it slowly, in a near trance, hypnotized by the shaking and scratching that would not leave him, by the long dark hall that seemed to stretch interminably into the empty building.

He seemed to float down the hall, stopping at an open door. The sound of voices came from the room. Wakeman stopped at the door, the sound of rhythmic scratching in his head mixing now with angry voices.

A man was standing in the big, empty room, in the shadows at the far wall. He looked up, startled, when Wakeman entered. He was holding a gun.

And then there came a quiet, smooth zing: but it came not from Daniel's gun but from that of another, somewhere in the rear of the room, beyond the the door that hung half-open.

Wakeman rushed into the room and over to the young man, who was struggling to a sitting position against the wall, gasping. He knelt.

Daniel looked at him with pain in his huge brown eyes. A brown forelock hung over his smooth brow. "You. I told you not to come back. To stay at home."

"Daniel, who shot you?" said Wakeman. "What's happening?"

"Him. In there," gasped Daniel, pointing to a door in the far wall. "Hurry. You must stop him. Him, from the mansion."

"You mean McX? Fourier?"

Daniel nodded weakly, "I told you that you would kill. . . ." He trailed off, but then was looking up at

Wakeman, his eyes dark pools in the soft, youthful face. "Arthur Inman," he said: then he went limp and the life flickered out of his eyes.

Wakeman recoiled. *You will kill twice in getting to him*, the young man had said days ago. Wakeman crouched motionless by Daniel for a few moments, looking into the young man's face. Well, Daniel had been at least half right, thought Wakeman. The boy was a seer after all. Twice, was it? Well, he would show prophecy: he was not a mere puppet. He pried Daniel's revolver from the dead fingers, rose and strode quietly to the door the young man had pointed to. On the way he heard loud, abrasive scuffing sounds coming from the room beyond.

The knob turned in his hand, but when Wakeman tried to push the door open he found it blocked. He pushed mightily, and the door slowly gave way. He had it about half-way open when he heard another quiet *zing* and a part of the door frame splintered. He jumped back, but only for a second: he planned to seize the rhythm. He saw a cabinet through the partly opened door. He stepped back a ways and then threw his entire weight at the door. Whatever the man inside had used to block the door gave way and Wakeman rolled inside the room, coming to a stop behind the cabinet.

Then he heard two more *zings*. But the bullets were

not directed at him: they had not hit anything in the room. He peered around the cabinet. At the far end of the room, a man knelt at the window. A coffee table had been moved parallel to the wall and placed on its side as a partial shield: it covered the lower part of the man's body. As Wakeman watched, the man raised a rifle to his shoulder, looked through the telescopic lense mounted on the stock. . . .

Wakeman saw the man was Fourier, alias McX. Instantaneously, Daniel's prophecy rang in his ear: *You will kill twice in getting to him.* No, he wouldn't. "Him" was here, and he would dispense with "him" before killing again.

The rifle fired, once, twice--

Wakeman's own weapon flashed up and he aimed--

The explosions were many times louder than the rifle--which had employed a silencer--but just as effective. McX/Fourier was aiming the rifle for another shot when his back stiffened, and he shot up a few inches, and dropped the rifle. He put his hands to his back, and then fell to the floor.

Wakeman scrambled across the floor, kicking the rifle across the room, where it slammed into the wall, its telescopic lense shattering. He knelt by the old man's side. McX had managed to prop himself against the wall.

"You idiot," he said to Wakeman. "You've spoiled everything."

"Everything?" said Wakeman. "What's 'everything?'"

"Well, I wouldn't look out the window if I were you. But there is a man down there who, like me up here, is dying. It's McKenzie. I killed him, but you spoiled my grand exit. I should have known it was going awry when I saw the boy."

"McKenzie?" shouted Wakeman. "They don't advertise motorcade routes in advance. How did you find out?"

The old man looked resentfully at Wakeman. "You are a very poor listener. As I've told you before, I haven't lived two thousand years without acquiring a number of resources."

"All right. All right." said Wakeman. "But why did you kill him?"

"You haven't learned anything, have you? It's in the *master plot*. The Tablets. The Book. It had to happen."

A pause. "If you are so aware of prophecy," said Wakeman, "why did you not see that you, yourself, would be killed? Why didn't you kill me when you had the chance? In the mental ward?"

"I'm not party to the whole thing, you idiot," said McX. "He just tells me the parts he wants me to know. . . ."

"Wait a minute," said Wakeman, grasping the old man's forearm. "Who is he?"

McX's eyes fluttered. "It shouldn't have happened this way. I was duped. I have no more loyalty to him."

"Who is *him*?" Wakeman tried to sit the old man up. McX winced.

"Fourier, of course," rasped McX. "Who did you think?"

Wakeman's universe shifted, back and forth. Sirens split the air. *You will kill twice. . . .* "But I thought you were Fourier. The card you gave me. . . ."

"Me?" laughed the old man, wincing again. "I'm not Fourier. I'm just his agent. If I was him. . . ."

Wakeman looked away, closed his eyes a moment, looked back again. "All right. Then tell me something about me. What part do I have to play in this *master plot*?"

McX's eyes opened. "Why, I thought you'd figured it out by now. You're the avatar of all this." He paused. "But then again, even I hadn't seen it clearly until now. Now I see how it all comes out."

"What?" said Wakeman, shaking the old man again. "How does it all come out?"

But McX just looked dully at him. Then he began again, his voice fainter now, "The doctors in the mental ward, the Golden Path, had found out the coordinates of

your appearance. They intercepted you, planned to use you. But their objectives were unclear, their whole metaphysics were mistaken. He sent me to infiltrate them. I was there . . . Among my many names is Malick. They could not confound the master plot. . . ."

He had trailed off. "Wait a minute," said Wakeman. "Don't die yet. You are confusing Fourier's novel and reality. Try to snap out of it for just a while longer. Remember, I didn't bring about your end."

The old man's eyes opened again and he tried to laugh. "Confusing . . . novel . . . reality! What's the difference? You were sleepwalking, correct? Or were you? Maybe before you woke up you spent a little time in the mental ward. How did you think you got in that train station, *sleepwalking*?" The old man was actually chuckling. "What's a pity, you had to come back, and I had to get you out all over again!"

Wakeman sat back, dazzled. What the old man was telling him was impossible, but the sleepwalking incident had been so strange, and so had much that followed during the Festival, that almost anything was believable at this point. "You're telling me that while I was . . . sleepwalking, I spent some time in the mental ward under the name of Arthur Inman? You're not joking with me?"

The old man shook his head, "No, this time I'm not

joking."

"But I was asleep for only a few hours. . . ."

"Stranger things have happened during Festival. "The boy knew you, didn't he? How else could he have known you?"

Wakeman rocked back on his heels. How, indeed, *could* the youngster have known? "All right. So I was in the mental ward not once, but twice, the first time under the name Arthur Inman," he hissed. "I've found out about my birth name. Just tell me how Fourier was able to write about it in *The Circular Gardens*, and publish it months before."

At this point there came the sounds of footsteps within the building. McX looked up. "Don't worry. There were only two policemen with McKenzie. He commands a good deal less real influence than his popularity would lead one to believe."

"Tell me about the book," insisted Wakeman.

The old man coughed. "Here is the crux of the issue: does art imitate life or vice versa? I've never decided, myself. In these chaotic times, cause and effect are sometimes reversed. I believe there is a popular expression: "Is it behind the curve or ahead of the curve?"

Wakeman leaned down toward the old man. "Just tell me one more thing. Why is it that Fourier wants McKenzie

dead. Why?"

But the old face was pale, and McX began coughing convulsively. Then he whispered: "Two thousand years and it comes to this. . . . He had promised me a role in another of his projects. . . ."

As the old man died, Wakeman looked into his eyes and it seemed for a moment that the endless parade of history flickered there: caravans on the desert, great war and trading fleets flung out over the oceans, the discovery of new earths. Then, the light went out of them and McX seemed finally inhuman, a grotesque wood carving, darkened by centuries of exposure.

Wakeman moved back, tossing the revolver well out of his reach. Then he sat back to await the coming ordeal. The sun had fallen behind the immense buildings on the square, and the room was immersed in shadows.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

For a week I watched his journey through the metropolis, followed with high interest his mission in the city's solemn stone quarters and marble palaces. I witnessed the expedition to the place of madness and attended his exploration of these streets, these ancient streets which wind through the city and circle back finally to themselves. That he could for a moment more linger on some winding, carpeted staircase, his fingers tracing the delicate line of a gilded banister, his senses immersed in the aroma of incense and the cadences of symphonies! That he could stand a minute more and watch as a shaft of light illuminates a silent room and falls suspiciously on objects no longer innocent, listening to ethereal choirs and voices singing, from afar, half-remembered tunes!

But he had much more to do.

After the interrogation Wakeman was set free: only McX's fingerprints were revealed on the rifle, and it was clear to the authorities that Wakeman had had nothing to do with the assassination, indeed that he had tried to prevent it. At seven o'clock he was let out of a police cruiser in front of his apartment building.

There was a note attached to his door, a card.

Wakeman unlocked the door and immediately opened the card.

Paul Fourier requests your presence at his residence on Mount Immanuel this evening for a ball marking the end of Festival. You may catch the tramway at eight.

He had been the only passenger. He had inquired with the conductor and was told that Mr. Fourier's other guests had arrived the previous evening. Then the conductor had pointed to a large door at the other side of the station.

A servant opened the door as Wakeman approached and said "Welcome. Mr. Fourier has been expecting you." He pointed to a flight of stairs. "Just take those and you'll be on the mountaintop. You'll arrive in the main foyer."

The foyer was spacious, with a plush red carpet, lit softly. A few pieces of sumptuous furniture were arrayed around the walls. Wakeman trudged in over the deep pile carpeting, wondering where to go next.

There were several doors in the room, opening off all four walls. Over only one of the doors was there a sign.

It read *Office*.

An office on Fourier's mountain? Odd. Where was the ball? Where were the guests?

Wakeman thought he could hear music behind one of the nearer doors. He walked over and opened it: ahead was a

magnificent hall, gilded and ornate, stretching off so far into the distance hen could not see the end of it. But there was no one there.

He closed the door, then tried two of the other doors. They were locked.

By this time he had wandered close to the office. He could detect movement inside, and a light was on. He opened the office's door and walked slowly in, looking this way and that. There was something odd about the place: the dim light from several rows of naked bulbs on the ceiling far above shone flatly on the light-brown walls. Indeed, it was hardly an "office" at all: it was more like a great empty post office. Its distant walls reverberated with several sounds: the whispering of two clerks behind a counter at the far end of the chamber, the sound of his own footsteps, and a strange, rhythmic *Ahhhh . . . Ahhhh*," which seemed like a giant, amplified exhalation.

One of the clerks looked up as Wakeman approached.

"Can I help you?" he said.

A long pause. Wakeman could think of nothing to say. This was not what he had expected.

"Well," he finally managed. "What is this?"

"What is what, sir?"

"This . . . office."

"It's the office, sir. You're in the office. Where did you want to go?"

"Well, I'm not sure. . . ." He heard his voice echo.

The clerk waited expectantly. The other clerk had put down his pen and was looking at Wakeman also.

Wakeman was embarrassed. "It's just not what I expected," he said. "What office is this?"

"As I said, this is the office," replied the clerk.

"I know it's an office," Wakeman said, somewhat flabbergasted by now. "I want to know *what* office."

The clerk stood up. "I'll get the manager. You can talk to him."

"No!" said Wakeman. After all the trouble he had had getting here, the last thing he wanted at this point was any commotion. This was to be an orderly, civilized visit. "You don't seem to understand. I just want to know to what agency your office is connected. It's just that it's odd to have an office all the way up here. . . ."

The clerk shook his head solemnly. "I'll get the manager, sir."

"That will be all right!" Wakeman almost shouted. "I don't want to trouble anyone. I'll just be on my way."

At this point a well-dressed older man walked out of a door behind the counter. "What's the trouble here," he

said severely.

The clerk whispered something in his ear.

He walked out from behind the counter. "Can I help you, sir?" he said.

"I was just inquiring as to the official nature of your office," Wakeman replied, tiredly.

The manager replied that there was no doubt of the official nature of his office, and that if Wakeman wanted to inquire further into it, he was perfectly welcome. The two clerks were looking at Wakeman from beyond the counter. They stood side by side, whispering to one another.

Wakeman was becoming irritated. "What I'm trying to find out, is what this is!" he said. "I mean, what's its function!"

"Sir, you are yelling," said the manager. "You don't have to yell."

"Look." Wakeman replied. "I'm sorry I yelled. Just forget it." He turned to leave.

"We would be glad to help," said the manager, bustling around in front of Wakeman. "Just what were you looking for?"

"I was invited to a party at Mr. Fourier's residence, but I got turned around and wound up in this office. I didn't even know there was anything up here but the Fourier residence."

The manager beamed. "Why, no wonder you're confused. Mr. Fourier's estate is on the far side of the mountain. Moreover, he is no longer affiliated with us."

Wakeman hesitated. "Let me get this straight. He separated from you, leaving what?"

"Why, just what you see," said the manager. "The office."

"Whose office?" Wakeman said, his voice rising to near hysteria. The two clerks stood huddled together, watching him.

"Now, don't get upset again," said the manager.

The rhythmic *ahhhh* sound seemed to have intensified.

"I'm sorry. Again, I'm sorry," said Wakeman. "What I'm saying is that you can't be just an office. You have to be connected to something."

"Is that so?" said the manager, looking up earnestly into Wakeman's face. "I'm afraid I don't follow you."

Wakeman felt his patience dissipating. He looked behind the counter, where the two clerks were huddled, whispering. There were papers piled on each clerk's desk. He walked past the manager and behind the counter. The two clerks jumped back in alarm.

"Just a minute, sir," said the manager.

Wakeman picked up a letter. The letterhead said, simply, *The Office*.

Trembling, Wakeman looked up from the letter and said to one of the clerks: "You mean to tell me that you have no function here, and that this whole set-up, manager, clerks, papers, desks, is just . . . just . . . an OFFICE?"

The three men stood with averted eyes.

Wakeman dropped the letter to the floor.

He was in an office for office's sake.

He heard a noise from the room behind the clerks' area. Then a column of people streamed from the room. They had on all variety of costumes--devils, angels, monks, royalty--and were carrying drinks and smoking cigarettes. One of them clapped the manager on the back as they passed him and said, "Fine set-up you have here, Fred". Quickly, the space behind the counter filled up. "Excuse me," said first one celebrant, then another. A woman with garish lipstick and heavily rouged cheeks walked up to Wakeman and asked for a light. He pulled out his lighter and lit her cigarette. She looked at him mysteriously over the brim of a cocktail glass and said, "You're blocking traffic."

"Blocking traffic to what?" Wakeman replied.

"Mr. Fourier's splendid gardens," the woman replied.

"The Circular Gardens."

By then the crowd had flooded behind the counter and

were pushing him along. Before he knew it, he had left the Office, walked through the anterior room, then exited through another door into a garden. The garden was lit not only by an occasional unobtrusive lamp but by the comet, burning bright overhead.

The revelers had disappeared as suddenly as they had come: he saw the last of them, holding drinks and cigarettes, hurrying around a hedge.

Wakeman turned and took measure of his surroundings.

On one side of the garden was the building out of which he had just been swept. It stretched on both sides into the darkness, without seeming limits. To both Wakeman's right and left, white-columned porticoes could be seen, lighted by the comet and moon. On the one remaining side, the garden stretched into seeming infinity. Wakeman began walking.

He walked deeper and deeper into the garden. There was utter stillness, and silence. Where were the guests who had swept him out of the office, and whose voices he thought he could hear at intervals? As if in answer, Wakeman heard the sound of footsteps. The sound seemed to be coming from somewhat deeper in the garden. He stopped, listening, but heard nothing more.

Soon he was in a much wilder portion of the garden. There were great evergreen trees here, pointing straight

into the heavens, lining the paths. They cast great shadows over the garden and the pathway through it. Now and then an immense gust of wind tossed the trees about, causing the shadows to sweep back and forth over the park like those of giants. Huge boulders appeared now at intervals, as if the skeleton of the mountain was protruding into view. The boulders seemed to form an echo chamber on either side of the path: Wakeman could now hear the distinct sound of multiple footsteps.

After walking amidst the flowers and shrubs for a while, Wakeman noticed that he was gradually circling around toward the white porticoes. As he neared them, he saw that under the veranda were several statues, placed at wide intervals. He walked up to the closer one, and looked into its face. What he saw caused him to step back in astonishment.

It was a statue of Diana.

It was so real there was little possibility of mistake. There was her shoulder length, wavy hair, those delicate cheekbones, the huge, narrow-set eyes. As they would be in real life, the eyes were directed over his head, focused on something beyond and entirely unrelated to him. Wakeman had to turn and look. Fifty or so yards away stood a pavilion. Under its circular roof stood another statue, of a male, its lower half lit by the

comet, its head and face shadowed by the pavilion's roof. Wakeman started over.

Just then a security guard appeared around a hedge and walked up to Wakeman. "Mr. Fourier has requested that his guests gather at the station. There has been a change in the situation of the comet. Mr. Fourier feels that his guests would be safer in the city. In case of disaster they may need medical attention."

"Disaster!" said Wakeman, paralyzed. "But I thought all the scientists were saying there was no danger. . . ."

"As I said, there has been a change," said the guard. "Please come with me immediately."

"But I just got here. I haven't even found the ballroom. Or met Mr. Fourier. . . ."

"He will probably see off his guests at the station," said the guard. "But you must come with me now."

As he walked down the steps toward the station which clung to the mountainside like a beetle to a rock, Wakeman heard the sound of many people talking and laughing. And when he walked into the station he was amazed at the size of the crowd. The waiting transit car was almost full and there were enough people to fill the car again sitting and standing around the station. Many of the people were in costume, but, perhaps due the Festival being over, most

were not.

The guard had closed the transit car's door. Now he stood up on a bench. "Mr. Fourier sends his regards, and hopes you will all have a safe trip to the city. Those of you who have not been able to get on the car the first time will descend when it comes back up. It will take about forty minutes for the car to make a round tip. In the meantime, please held yourself to the refreshments and enjoy the view."

Then the car's machinery started whirring. Wakeman walked to the front of the car, where he watched the conductor, in his cubicle, busily punching several buttons. Finally, the conductor released a lever and the car started slowly to move. Wakeman watched as the guests inside the car slid by, seat by seat.

It was at this point that he caught sight of Diana and Gabriel. They were sitting at the back of the car, on the opposite side, taking in the magnificent view of the city below.

"Hey!" Wakeman started to yell. But he caught himself before anything more could come out. What was the use?

But perhaps Diana sensed his presence. She turned and looked at him.

He waved, but her brown eyes seemed to linger only

for a minute on his surface and then she had passed by. The last he saw of her, her face had broken, just for an instant, into that rare expression beyond passivity, that look of near-hilarity combined with irony. Then all he could see of her was the back of her head, her long brown hair, as she turned again toward the window and Gabriel. Wakeman watched as the car became smaller and smaller, then disappeared entirely against the lighted backdrop of the metropolis.

"Ah, the view is stunning," said someone at Wakeman's elbow. Wakeman turned. It was Arget. "I see my intercession was helpful."

"I have you to thank for my invitation, then," said Wakeman.

"No thanks is necessary," said Arget. "I just hope you have gotten everything you came for."

"Well, hardly," laughed Wakeman. "I hadn't been here an hour before I was being told I must leave. I didn't even get to meet Fourier."

"Why, he was just here a minute ago. . . ." Arget looked around. "Too bad," he continued. "I guess he's gone back to his mansion. He's decided to ride out the comet up here."

"Ride it out?" said Wakeman. "I thought there was little danger. . . ."

"That's what most scientists said. In fact, they're still saying it, according to the latest newscast. I just heard it on one of Fourier's televisions. They say it will be close, but that the comet will still miss us. But, a few days ago, they said it would never get this close."

The two men had sat down on a bench. A few feet away, on the other side of a railing, the mountain dropped off over a precipice. Wakeman looked out over the city, a carpet of lights below him. From here Bonneville looked tiny, and he understood to what extent it was at the mercy of cosmic forces. Above, from horizon to horizon, the sky was pale white, the stars unseen and the moon only barely visible through the comet's tail.

Arget had begun speaking again. "Are we about to achieve the end of time, the close of the great book, the age of simultaneity the cult preaches about?"

Wakeman looked at him in puzzlement, dazzled at the sight above and below, and having heard only part of what the man had said.

"The cult," explained Arget, "believes that we're in a great book. . . ."

Wakeman nodded, absently. Something hovered about on the edges of his consciousness, a revelation perhaps.

"Not that I'm a believer," continued Arget. "But if

the comet hits, before we all go out in flames, the cult will be saying that it all came down to that assassination."

"What?" said Wakeman.

Arget paused. "Haven't you been keeping up with the news? An election was held early today. The results have been tabulated and those who favor action against the comet have been defeated. They had been poised to take power immediately and launch a nuclear strike against the comet, against the advice of a host of environmentalists and scientists. Robert McKenzie, you will recall, was the leader of this faction. Before his assassination, he held a huge lead in the poles. But after he was killed, it was immediately reported that his assassin--who was himself immediately assassinated--was a member of McKenzie's own party. The electorate saw only madness and disarray in the pro-strike forces, and by a small margin, voted them down. The assassination couldn't have been better timed by someone who actually *desired* the world's end."

But Wakeman was not listening. Everything had slid into place with the utter simplicity and inevitability of absolute truth. How completely and efficiently it had come to resolution! Efficiently, that is, except for a few loose ends. . . .

"Do you know anything about *dopplegangers*?" said

Wakeman.

Arget, who had been interrupted, looked over curiously. "The double? A bit. It was a popular motif in literature at one time. . . ."

"I mean in real life. Do they exist?"

Arget looked over and said flatly. "Of course not." Then he smiled. "During Festival, perhaps. But *that's* over with for another year."

Wakeman looked away, out over the metropolis. The white effulgence of the comet seemed to have descended even lower over the city, and, as Wakeman watched, three objects shot out of the sky and arched with burning tails over the white-peaked Berkeleys. Suddenly he was struck with a powerful sensation of *deja vu*. He was reliving a dream. Exactly a week ago, while sleepwalking in the Crystal Palace, he had dreamt of a comet lowering over the city. It had not seemed like a dream then, nor did it now.

"The cult believes the Great Book, on its completion, will be without outlet," Arget was saying. "And thus time will be not only finite but illusory. There will be no such thing as progress. . . ."

And just about this time a week earlier he had been reading a note, Wakeman thought. Scribbled in his own hand, it had seemed to portend for him a strange and

unanticipated destiny, to hint at something whose contours were hardly clearer now than they had been a week ago. Where had it gone? Too much to hope that he still had it. He searched his pocket anyway, and pulled out a transit schedule. Of course the space where the note had been written on that other schedule a week ago, was, on this one, blank. . . .

Wakeman pulled a pen out of another pocket and began writing.

I wonder how it ends. But who can say where a circle begins and where it ends? It begins now, and ends now, and all that happens between happens now, because it is complete. The circle is not exclusively absurd.

Wakeman leaned back and thought, now what does that mean? It had flowed from his pen as if he had practiced it. Of course, he was aware of the various symbolisms of the circle in both primitive cultures and modern art, but the knowledge was such a commonplace there was no reason to write it down. Why then, had he written it down? Had he intended the note to be a reminder?

"Ah, I see you are preoccupied," Arget was saying.

"Perhaps I'll get up and wander around."

"No! Don't go," said Wakeman, stuffing the transit schedule back in his pocket. "I didn't mean to be remote. Tell me about Fourier's book. Has he told you anymore

about it?"

Arget sat back. "I believe when we talked last I told you that he had suspended publication of the novel. He felt it was imperfect, and wanted to revise the ending."

"I believe that's right," said Wakeman. Spots danced in the air, sparks flew around, and the sky was brighter than ever.

"For a long time he couldn't figure out that final twist, that final irony he felt the book needed," said Arget. "But then he had it. Now the book depends on the chief character's persistent inability to see, even at the very last, the nearness of the very thing he spends the entire book yearning for."

Wakeman was looking out over the city. Sirens could now be heard wailing from various sectors. "I'd like to read that book," he muttered. "I wonder how it ends."

VITA

Ronald P. Jenkins was born in Takoma Park, Maryland. He attended elementary and junior high schools in Tennessee and Alabama, and graduated from high school in Merritt Island, Florida. He attended Brevard Community College in Cocoa, Florida, and Chattanooga State Technical Community College in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In 1987 he entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville as a junior, and graduated with a major in English and a minor in Philosophy in 1989. He was admitted to the University of Tennessee graduate school in fall of 1989, and graduated with a Master of Arts degree with a major in English in May, 1992.