

Nathan left the park and walked idly onto a side street. He passed several buildings and noted their grey and drab brown colors. Two blocks down, he reached a pub that had opened early and went inside. The lights were still off and the interior was shady. Two men spoke quietly at a table near the far wall where they sat almost in the dark. A young man hunched over a drink at the bar near them. On a shelf, voices spoke indistinctly from a radio. Nathan took the seat at the bar closest the door. The bartender, a broad-chested man with red hair, came and Nathan ordered a large pretzel and a whiskey. He got the pretzel doughy and hot from the microwave behind the bar and the whiskey in a fat glass. His head bowed, he tore a long, thick piece from the pretzel. He broke this into bits that he chewed slowly one after another, following each by a sip from his drink. When the bartender checked on him, Nathan asked, not feeling it out of order, "What would you say if I had another drink?"

"Of course, let me get you one."

"But do you think I should have another one?"

"Have another drink?"

"Yes."

"If you're in the mood, why not?"

"Well, I don't know if I am in the mood. This is why I'm asking."

"I think you're in the mood."

"Why then?"

The bartender smiled as if on edge. "Listen, it's just a drink. I won't push you to have one if you'd rather not."

Nathan stared at the bartender. "Alright, I'll let you know if I'd like the drink." The bartender relaxed and backed down the bar. Nathan studied his empty glass considering. The two men at the table were talking louder and one looked over at him. No, it wouldn't be wise for this afternoon, he thought. I'll stay sober. He rose, paid, and left the bar.

Nathan walked to the subway and took the train downtown. He wandered several blocks through Greenwich following his own steps with no destination in mind. Late in the afternoon, he caught an F line train and connected to the 6. He disembarked at a corner crowded with glassy skyscrapers and walked to the one that housed his employer, the magazine publisher. Work was letting out and people streamed from the tinted glass doors onto the sidewalk. He waited for Frank Iannoccone, his good friend and another writer from the magazine. He could talk to Frank better than anyone else so had arranged to meet him this afternoon. Frank showed, saw Nathan and went to him.

"It's done," Nathan said. He had told Frank earlier about his court date with Jan. The two started up the street slowly, Nathan with his narrow face toward the sidewalk. Frank, tall and heavysset, stooping as he spoke.

"Don't sound too happy about it."

"I'm not."

"I guess that's how it is. Brian Hallahan in sales was the same when he split with his wife. He got awfully blue. But the mood won't last; definitely not too long with you. You had plenty of good reasons to break with Jan after all her complaining."

"I will no longer have to put up with her."

"And now you have your own apartment too. Stay up to exactly when you want without anyone to remind you of work. Go out where you choose. Write without being interrupted. You did get your things out from your old apartment?"

"I did that even before the divorce."

"Sounds like you are doing well then."

Nathan shook his head. "I don't know. I've had this strange feeling since this morning. I don't know what to do now I'm without Jan. She seemed to make all the real choices for me. I've got to do that alone now."

"Nathan, you worry too much. You'll be better off than if you had stayed with her. Jan was a shrew. You should be glad you don't have to put up with her anymore." Frank elaborated several awful things Jan had done and said to Nathan as if to prove it. Nathan pretended to listen but was thinking of his new life. I'm alone in my new apartment, he considered, cooking for myself, cleaning, keeping up the place. And I have to decide what I do there. I decide what happens there and how I will act. I decide who I'll be. How can I listen to Frank when I'm faced with this of a sudden and pretend I'm not worried?