apartment building. You go to sleep in your jail cell in Odessa, Texas, waiting to be arraigned for auto theft, and wake up, after the most horrendous nightmares of your life, a lawyer representing a body-piercing operation in Escondido—you know, outside San Diego—two hours before you've got a deposition, for which you're not at all prepared, in a malpractice case. One of your client's employees didn't properly disinfect one of those jeweled barbells—a twenty-year-old girl's nasal membrane is permanently damaged. Get the idea?"

"You realize," I said, "that you'd be increasing the number of lawyers."

"I hadn't thought of that," Robinson said. "Come to think of it, you'd be decreasing the number of prisoners, too. You always could, of course, metamorphose them back—status quo ante. What's wrong with that?" he asked. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Lawyer becomes prisoner, prisoner lawyer—metamorphosed back into who you were. A form of exact—maybe exacting would be a better word—justice, that's all it would be," he said, his eyes squinting from the glare of the sun. "No more than a form of exacting justice."

Something Split

I REALLY DON'T CARE," CARL WYLIE SAID AFTER I asked him what he thought law was.

"Do you know what Holmes said it was?" I asked.

"What did Holmes say it was?"

"A great anthropological document."

"A great anthropological document. A great anthropological document. What? The millions of tons of paper generated every year by public offerings? The billions of words written by lawyers every day? How about the Supreme Court? That opinion declaring unconstitutional that Colorado law—the law approved by a statewide referendum, by fifty-four percent of those voting. The one that says no preferential treatment for queers, no legislation privileging queers. I haven't read—I am never going to read

it, are you? Who ever reads Supreme Court opinions? I know I don't. It's like when a friend of mine from college asked me what I thought money was. I told him I didn't know and didn't really care. He said it's a social institution. Now, that says a lot, doesn't it? Money is a social institution. Chaos. That's what interests me. Chaos. What did Holmes say about chaos?"

"Chaos?"

"Complexity so intricate no one can fathom it. Large things within small things, small things within large things—things encompassing things which would seem to be beyond them. Chaos. Pardon me a minute, will you?"

Wylie walked over to the other side of the bar to make a telephone call. We were seated at a window table at Spartina, a bistro on Greenwich, a few blocks north of Chambers Street in TriBeCa. It was six o'clock, a warm, sunny September day. I'd known Wylie since the early eighties. He was lead partner on a multi-district bankruptcy securities fraud case I worked on when I was an associate with Sebold Manning & Pickering, a large New York firm. Because I'd been out of law school several years already when I came to Sebold Manning, I was only a couple of years younger than Wylie. Bulky, broad-shouldered, an avid tennis player, hair combed back tightly, graying on the sides, a bit long in the back, Wylie managed to make his presence felt. As he talked, he'd move his body around in his chair, making quick motions with his hands, often impatiently. Before I arrived he'd ordered a glass of Chilean Merlot and a double espresso, and a pitcher of ice water. "I drink three, four of them a day," he'd told me, twisting a slice of lemon peel into his espresso, stirring it slowly with a white plastic straw. "Espresso and, when I'm at the office, chilled Volvic. During the day I try to eat only fruit. I can't even drink regular coffee, of any kind, anymore—it has to be espresso. I time when it hits—the extent to which it speeds the thought process. That precise point when consciousness is heightened and everything glows."

Wylie returned, took a quick sip of Merlot, then sat back in his chair and relaxed, crossing his legs. "Busy," he said, shrugging, when I asked how he'd been. "The last few weeks in particular. My senior associate—we've been working on the Productive Data takeover. We represent one of the banks, a British bank—well, not quite. British banking laws are highly idiosyncratic. My associate—her name's Karen Tierney—she's excellent. She's definitely going to make partner. She's eight months pregnant. We've been working on this for months, there've been threats of litigation, all sorts of fighting—you may have read about it in the papers. It heats up again right after Labor Day—suddenly everyone wants the deal done. I'm back one day, after two weeks in the country. I am terrified Karen's going to miscarry. The other associate—nice kid—he's in his sixth year, tries hard, but just can't cut it. But I'm getting off-track. What I was saying. Every once in a while I don't think it's a bad idea for lawyers to remember that what goes on, at least on some level of our brains, is that we have to imagine everything coming apart. That's all.

No big deal. The Boy Scout motto—be prepared, right? It's what we are. Out of control, always prepared, Boy Scout control freaks."

Wylie took another sip of wine. "The other day I was sitting in a meeting—you remember Joe Tanner, don't you? Tanner's latest thing is that half our maladies come from sitting too long. Of course, there are exceptions. Shumacher, for example."

"Didn't Shumacher leave?" I asked.

"Yes. Francis departed. Not, may I add, of his own volition. He's now head counsel for Olympus. Over a million a year. The weapons-procurement business. Armament transactions. I don't know, so don't ask me between whom! He owns a manor estate deep in the heart of Virginia. Breeds racehorses. It's what makes Shumacher exceptional—he's exceptional at meetings. Which goes to show that you can make a million dollars a year by pretending to know what you're doing, and being able to sit through interminable meetings without developing any serious maladies. Anyway, I was sitting in a horribly long and tedious one, and started thinking how many times I've gone through this kind of pressure—I mean of the four, five, six weeks, ten-, twelve-hour days, make-a-mistake-and-the-show-is-over variety. Let's see. Twenty-seven years, on average, say, four times a year—twenty-seven times four—one hundred eight. One hundred and eight times. Pressure's really not the right word for it, either. It's the *concentration.* That painful kind of fastidiousness, attentiveness. Details—how many details? Twenty-seven years—*trillions* of details! You ask me a month from now what the deal I've just done was about, I won't be able to tell you. Don't think it doesn't make me stop and wonder what it's done to my brain, either."

Wylie uncrossed his legs and sat up in his chair, his elbows propped on the table. He poured himself a glass of ice water and slowly drank it. "I made a remark to Whitney Fuller—he's in our Paris office now—about a lying bastard with Cronon Granby I'm trying to close a deal with. Fuller says, 'You've become a real cynic, haven't you?' What? I'm supposed to believe everything I hear? Cynical? Of course I am. How can you be a lawyer and not be cynical? But a cynic? I am not a cynic. Cynics are the second-, the third-raters. For the cynics I have nothing but contempt. There are rules, basic rules—they may change, they may or may not be to your liking—but there are rules. The cynics don't give a damn about the rules. Serious—well, serious I am. I take what I do very seriously. I happen to think it's a very serious business. Blood on the floor sometimes, right? Very seriously ironic—that's what. Nonlawyers think of lawyers and think corruption, arrogance, pretentiousness—all of which, more or less, of course, are true. But irony? If Schlegel's definition of irony were applied to the practitioners of our stately art, it'd be the end of the Republic."

Wylie was smiling. "Schlegel. The nineteenth-century German philosopher. Friedrich Schlegel. 'Irony is the awareness of the infinite plenitude of chaos.' Friedrich Schlegel."

"Chaos," I said.

"Chaos," Wylie repeated, taking a sip of espresso and then of wine, sitting back again.

"Jeanne and I were at this dinner party Saturday

night up near the Guggenheim. Very wealthy people —your hundred-million-dollar types. They had an original Goya—a drawing. An absolutely beautiful small Matisse, a large Cézanne, on one of their walls. And these unbelievable American Indian blankets. Our hosts—the wife is a friend of Jeanne's from work, the husband a very nice guy, an anesthesiologist, the son of an Indiana glass family—glass as in glass for automobiles. Of course there was another lawyer there—there always is at least one. He was about my age, a couple of years younger, maybe. The first thing he asks—I hate it when another lawyer does this to me at a purely social occasion—is what I do. I tell him the firm. Oh, he says, he knows several of my partners. Then he asks what my practice is. Corporate, I say. He's waiting for me to ask him what he does, but I'm not in the mood, so I just sit there and don't say a word. So how's he break the silence? He asks what law school I went to! Fordham, I say."

"You went to Virginia."

"Who cares what law school I went to? Gary Pappas is one of the best lawyers in our firm and he went to Albany. What this guy wants me to know is where *he* went to law school. I ask him. 'Yale,' he says. Of course. Have you ever known anyone from Yale who didn't let you know that he went to Yale? Well, as far as I was concerned, that was enough chitchat with Boola-boola. I knew what was coming next—Bill and Hillary Clinton and Clarence Thomas stories. 'Those wild, halcyon days at the'—ever notice that about boolas? That it's always *the* Law School?

"Well, the evening, as it wound on, was, actually, quite pleasant. There was a movie producer there, and a vice president at ABC—*not* a pleasant business these days—a younger woman who works at the Rockefeller Foundation, a young man in advertising who does a lot of work in Berlin—if you think things are insane here, you should hear what's going on in Berlin! There's the usual small talk, the wine is excellent, which always helps. Then, what always happens—what you always end up talking about at every dinner party, it doesn't matter where—crime. Have you noticed? Everyone—even the otherwise very quiet Polish women who clean our offices—has crime on the brain. Of course, since we're lawyers we're supposed to know more about it than anyone else. So I tell my crime story. I'm walking back from lunch at Arcadia—they've got that great lobster club—when a flash of blue jeans and ponytail on Rollerblades grabs a cellular phone right out of the hands of a Japanese, and punches away, probably, as he blades right up Park Avenue. In broad daylight, as they say. Boola-boola then tells his. He lives on Madison in the upper Nineties—there've been armed robberies right in front of his building. His solution? Troops."

"Troops?"

"Federal troops. The Eighty-second Airborne. The paratroopers. On every corner. And camps. Work camps. Put them all in work camps. 'Troops—that's right—troops,' he says, while he's bringing this fairly large piece of leg of lamb at the tip of his fork, a bit of mint on it, up to his palate. And there these other people are, listening to him intently, as if he knows something they don't—except the young man in advertising, the one who does business in Berlin.

He says, 'But wouldn't the presence of federal troops depreciate property values?' To which Boola, with utmost sincerity, says, 'That's a good point. I hadn't thought of that. I'll have to think about that.'

Wylie moved his shoulders around, then pulled back again in his chair. Sitting a moment in silence, he suddenly seemed restless. I asked how things were at the firm. "Things at the firm? Changing," he said, and then was quiet. I asked how. "How? More pressure to bring business in, for one thing. That's how. You don't keep up, you're irrelevant fast—real, real fast. Gene Sutton, you know, just retired. At sixty."

"At sixty?"

"With a full—and for Gene that means a very full—pension. At sixty-five it's mandatory. Some firms are talking about making it mandatory retirement at sixty."

"That means that you . . ."

"Anywhere between eight and thirteen years from now and I'm out of here, with a full pension. The trade-off is, to get there I've got to work—there's absolutely *no* comparison—much harder than partners of my stature worked when I began. The business is so large now—and it's getting larger. We've got offices in seventeen cities now, eleven foreign. We just opened an office in Bombay. We're looking for associates who speak Hindi. The game is changing as we speak. Then, of course, there are those things that never change."

"Like?"

"Like, what lawyers do is determined by our—by 'our' I mean by our clients'—interests. It doesn't matter what kind of practice you have. It's always

been that way and always will be. What we do is determined by who pays us. There's not a whole lot more to it than that. How long does it take before you figure it out? Second year of law school? Conscious—conscientious—schizoids." Wylie's face broke into a grin. "Conscious, or, if you're the ethical type, conscientious schizoids, that's what lawyers are. I can't tell you who," he continued, lowering his voice, "but one of my partners—you know him—was in psychoanalysis. This, of course, is between me and you. Attorney-client."

"He's your client?"

"You know what I mean. Attorney-client. If you tell anyone, I will simply annihilate you."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Jack. We'll call him Jack."

"It's Cameron, isn't it?"

"I'm not going to tell you who it is," Wylie said. "Just remember this is attorney-client. I don't care who you think it is."

He finished his espresso, and, slowly, his glass of wine. "An Epicurean's upper-downer," he said with a quick shake of his head after he finished, then went on.

"Jack. Yes, Jack. Jack's psychoanalyst—not, by the way, one of those Psychoanalytic Institute sorts. He's a psychiatrist, an M.D. A nonlawyer fascinated by lawyers. His father was a partner at Broderick & Williams. Deputy secretary of something or other under Eisenhower. One of John Foster Dulles's closest friends. There was a big scandal, hush-hush, something to do with Batista, male prostitutes, little girls —Jack doesn't know all the facts. There's a lot of

that going around these days—children of lawyers who want to know what Father was really about. Father was the remote, secretive type—well, what a surprise! Anyway, the guy's into it. He tells Jack that Jack is in a state of schizogenesis."

Wylie laughed. "I had no idea what it meant, either. Jack—lawyer that he is—looks it up. It's a biological term. Reproduction by fission. Fission, splitting—Jack's paying the guy several hundred dollars an hour—'more than I get,' is how Jack puts it —to hear that his lawyer self is constantly splitting, and that he's replicating the split in every area of his life."

Wylie looked at the expression on my face. "It's not funny," he said. "Jack is a decent guy. *Very* highly respected. A terrific lawyer. Jack is all right. The poor guy's had a lot of trouble in his marriage. One of the last of the real gentlemen in this business. Soft-spoken. Radiates confidence. Women love him. He's fallen in love with a younger woman, a partner—I'm not sure, she could be of counsel—at that small international securities firm, Dennis Phillips's firm. She's Venezuelan, the daughter of the former ambassador to the United States. I think she's an American citizen now. She's divorced—her first husband was American. A very connected investment consultant here in New York—you do a Latin American deal, she knows the players. She has a daughter, a three-year-old. Jack's got a child with some kind of birth defect, and his eldest son has a serious drug problem—I mean very serious, like, heroin."

Wylie smiled. "So what do you think triggers the doctor's prognosis? Jack, during one of his sessions,

said that because he's a lawyer he has to constantly split hairs. Isn't that perfect! So what does the mind doctor say? He tells Jack that, as a lawyer, he has to be capable of deep moral compromise. You have to do things, be part of things, you don't want to be part of. You have to pretend to be what you're not. Well, you can't argue with that. We all know there are times when you're working on some deal that, if you were to think it through, you'd realize that it was going to ruin the lives of thousands of people and their families. We all do it—in one size, shape, form, or other. According to the doctor, the split that occurs when we do this is subconscious. It has to be. If it weren't, we couldn't do it. This, for the doctor, is a big, big deal. He says that lawyers, when they do something they really don't want to do, end up subconsciously sublimating their real feelings into—well, money, of course, and success. Status, power, the fact that by being a lawyer you are satisfying your father and mother—that sort of thing. This is the trouble, the doctor says. Imagine, the doctor tells Jack, what happens is like a cesspool of poison. He actually tells Jack—who, by the way, has put together toxic-waste-dump deals!—he tells him to imagine his brain's got a toxic-waste dump in it! The poison in his brain is anger, which, psychologically, manifests itself in one of two ways—in violence against others, or in violence against oneself. The violence against oneself most often expresses itself in a form of depressive behavior, which includes drinking—which Jack does much more than he should. The violence against others . . ."

Wylie stopped. "I know what you're thinking—psychobabble, right?"

"No, not at all," I said. "I always found Jack intriguing—though I'm not supposed to know who Jack is."

"Well," Wylie said, slumping back into his chair, arms folded, "Jack is telling me this at nine in the morning. Right before we have to go into an all-day meeting. We're working on the Multivision Systems merger—we represent a consortium of Asian banks and our clients are here from Hong Kong, from Tokyo. It's going to be a long day and we've been working very, very hard. This is a two-and-a-half-billion-dollar deal, which, even these days, is a considerable amount of money. Jack? He says he saw his analyst—an emergency session—the evening before, after work, late, ten o'clock. He starts telling me what happened. This is right before we go into the meeting. He says the doctor—who, according to Jack, didn't look too hot himself, his eyes were bloodshot, he had that wiped-out look—the mind doctor begins the special session by asking Jack what he thinks he's learned about himself these past few months in therapy. Jack, a bit puzzled by the question, thinks it over and says, slowly, that he supposes what he's learned is that he is either chronically depressed, or he's chronically acting out his depression by drinking, or he's chronically engaged in acts of violence against others—or, depending on the time of day, all the above. The doctor says, 'Yes! Yes!' as if he's Edison or someone saying 'Eureka!' 'Yes! Yes! That's right, Jack! Yes!' Then Jack says, after a bit more rumination, that it's his understanding, too, that this chronic state of depression—this manifested violence

—has a lot to do with the fact that he's a lawyer. 'Good.' the mind doctor says. 'Good! You see that! Wonderful!' Suddenly, Jack says—don't forget our clients, who have come halfway around the world to pay us several million dollars for our services, are waiting for us outside my office and, I suspect, beginning to get a little irritated—suddenly, Jack says, something inside him *snaps*.

"You know," Wylie said, "I'm sitting there, thinking to myself, God, if these people had any idea what we were doing with their time. Here I am at my desk, looking over Jack's shoulder at the Chrysler Building, and there's Jack, pacing back and forth across my office, with this tight-lipped grin on his face, snapping his fingers. '*Snaps!* Yes, *snaps! Snaps!*' Then he starts laughing—too loud, in fact, for my comfort. 'That's right, something inside me—yes, of course—*split*. Something *split*!' I tell him to get on with it—I'm beginning to laugh myself. Jack says that he looked straight at his quack—that's what he's calling him now, his quack—rubbing his eyes, shaking his head. 'Well, yes, doctor, that is what I do,' he says in this calm, deliberate voice. 'Yes, I am a lawyer. That is how I make my living, doctor. I make my living by committing acts of violence against myself and acts of violence against others.' The doctor doesn't know what to say. Jack goes on. 'May I ask you something, doctor?' The doctor, not quite sure what is happening, says, 'Yes, of course, you can, Jack, of course you can.' 'Let me get this straight, doctor,' Jack says. 'What you are saying, in effect, is that because I am a lawyer, I am a pathologue—that

is what we're saying, isn't it, doctor?' Jack said he'd lowered his voice to a whisper—he was staring at the quack as hard as he could. 'Is that what we are saying, doctor? Well, if it is, then, doctor, please, I want you to tell me . . .'

"Jack then looks at me. He tells me not to worry. He assures me that he's fine. He tells me not to worry about the clients, either. 'Remember,' he says, 'we're putting at least two billion clean in their pockets in a way no one else in the world knows how to do quite as efficiently as we do.' 'I know you're fine,' I tell him. 'If I didn't think you were, I'd already have had you locked up in one of the empty conference rooms. I just want to know what happened.'

" 'What happened?' Jack said. 'Simple. Before I could ask the question, mid-sentence, this guy I've given over thirty thousand dollars to bolts from his chair and says—with my exact same tone of voice—that he refuses to sit there and be cross-examined by me. Then, while he's showing me to the door, he tells me that he never wants to see me again, and says, and not parenthetically either, that if I think his prognosis is wrong, then sue him for malpractice.' "

Wylie and I left Spartina and walked to West Street, where he caught a taxi. I continued farther downtown to the World Financial Center, where, at a small bar and restaurant on the Hudson, Steamers Landing, I met Matt Jansen, Shana Urquart, and Bill Voorhees, former associates of mine at Sebold Manning. Now in their late thirties, they, too, left the firm in the eighties. You reach Steamers Landing via a long esplanade that extends along the river toward New York Harbor. From it you can see Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, Staten Island, and—its green lights silhouetted in the distance—the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. Voorhees, Jansen, and Urquart were sitting outdoors when I arrived, two bottles of champagne and an array of appetizers on the table. The evening sky was violet-blue. There was a trace of sea salt in the air, warm still, and a nearly full moon. Across the river two Jersey City office towers cast long red and bright white reflections on the ebony water. Near one of them was a large round neon clock, a billboard shaped like a red Colgate toothpaste box beside it.

"So Wylie declined to join us? Well, fuck him," Jansen said with a laugh. He'd gotten heavy, almost stiff, but his large blue eyes were lively and expressive, and his voice had an easiness about it. "I heard he was named one of the best lawyers in New York by *New York* magazine."

"That wasn't Wylie," said Urquart. "Harry Balog was the only one from Sebold Manning." She brushed her dark brown hair back from her forehead. Attractive in a way everyone noticed—which she was aware of and used to—she spoke in a low yet distinct voice, at odds with the constant gestures she made with her hands. "At least he wasn't an idiot. He also didn't need to let you know every time he saw you he wanted to fuck you."

"Lauren Cobb," Jansen said.

"Clitless!" Voorhees shouted. Six feet tall and solidly built, he spoke in a tone on the edge of sarcasm. "I can't believe you used to call her that," Urquart

said. "Nor can I believe that you're calling her that now."

"No comment," Jansen declared, waving both hands back and forth in front of his smiling face.

"Clitless Cobb. The iguana," Voorhees said. "Slimy. Bulging eyes. Do you think female iguanas have clitorises?"

"Don't you think we ought to change the subject?" Jansen asked.

"You brought her up, I didn't," said Voorhees. "But—not to change the subject too much—what do you think Wylie is making these days? Seven-hundred-fifty?"

"More than that," said Jansen.

"He's not making much more than that," said Voorhees.

"It's still a very wealthy partnership," Jansen replied. "I'd say a million at least."

"What are you making these days?" asked Voorhees.

"What am I making these days?" Jansen shot back. "None of your business, Billy. Has anyone ever told you how crude a fucker you are?"

"You can't be doing too badly," said Voorhees.

"I have health insurance—at least I did the last time I looked," Jansen said. "I'm not a temp."

"There are, you know, lawyers who are," said Urquart.

"I'm not at the point of putting off settling a case rather than give up the fees, like a lot of people I know," Jansen continued. "I don't know about you, but it costs me a lot of money to live these days. Three

quarters of a million it's going to cost me just to send my children through school."

"Less than what Wylie makes a year," said Voorhees.

Jansen laughed. "Less than what Wylie makes a year. More, though," he added, "than what those *grease*balls who hustle what comes in off a street like Nassau make. They *really* hate our asses."

"I hate your ass," said Voorhees, "and I'm your friend. Even the personal-injury 'zoids . . ."

" 'Zoids?' " asked Jansen. "What's a 'zoid?"

"Short for sleazoids. Even the personal-injury 'zoids who make a hell of a lot more than we do hate our asses. We at least have clients who actually pay us. Can you imagine your livelihood depending on how brain-dead a brain-dead baby is? There's a term I heard the other day—'a cancer misdiagnosis case.' 'Please, Lord, won't you send me a cancer misdiagnosis case!' "

"We are the ay-leet-ists," said Jansen.

"The what?" asked Voorhees.

"Don't you remember?" Jansen asked. "That's how Stone used to say it."

"Stone! What ever happened to that Negro?" asked Voorhees.

"Negro?" asked Urquart.

"Stone's done very well for himself," said Jansen. "Quite well, in fact."

"Is he still with Connor Lachaise?" asked Voorhees.

"I think so," said Jansen.

"They're still downtown, aren't they?" asked Voorhees.

"On Battery Park," Urquart said. "In the same building Parkman & Millay used to be in. Did you follow that? Now, that was scary!"

"I heard," Jansen said, "that the creditors have exhausted the liquidation and insurance pot and have begun going after partners' individual assets."

"Clients," Voorhees said. He was shaking his head. "That's what happened. Clients. The rainmakers walked. Bye-bye! It's become a freelance business, in essence—that's what it is. And how it's going to be, too, for at least the thirty or so more years we've got left in it. A law professor I know sent me an article by Richard Posner, which . . ."

"You mean 'Book-a-month Posner'?" asked Jansen.

"He's smarter than you are," Voorhees said. "I can see you trying to carry on an intelligent conversation with someone like Posner. There's a story—it may be apocryphal. Posner clerked for Brennan. Brennan said he'd met two geniuses in his life—William O. Douglas and Posner."

"Is Brennan still alive?" Urquart asked.

"I think so," Voorhees replied. "To tell you the truth, I'm not really sure. I do know he's not on the Supreme Court anymore. If he is alive, he must be close to ninety. Anyway, Posner's article is too long—law-review articles are all too long—but at least you can read most—not all, but most—of what he writes without wanting to projectile-vomit. He says the business always operated like a cartel and, until the sixties, into the seventies, things were more or less under control—there were fewer lawyers, no advertising, there was a sense of the profession, there was enough to go around. Then the market, with the baby boomers, opened up—more lawyers, advertising. Dial 1-800-LAWSUIT—have you seen those ads? I saw one at a bus stop out on the Island. There's been an astronomical increase in the number of lawsuits. It's a service business now. Other than the margins—government, which pays so shitty—that's what it is. Partnership isn't worth shit. You do business with a partner or an associate to the extent to which you get more from them than what you're giving. They start sucking too much off you and you're out of there—you start sucking too much off them and you're out of there, too. It's happening everywhere. The big firms, three, four, five years"—Voorhees waved his right hand up and down in a mocking motion—"bye-bye! I have a client who's studied Genghis Khan. Khan was the first to use freelance brigades."

"The Mongol?" asked Jansen. "You have fucking flipped your lid!"

"It's a military term," said Voorhees. "A unit of military organization. A group of fighters, but everyone's freelance—on his own. You go with the flow. Winner take all, losers—losers *lose*. These people are serious. This client—Cal Tech. Phi Beta Kappa. He's thirty-three years old and has made two—going on his third—separate fortunes in computers. He does *not* care for lawyers. You should hear him talk about the fatsos—he *despises* fatsos."

"Watch yourself," said Jansen. "I'm not doing that well with the girth myself."

"You'd be an exception, Matthew. You, he'd love. That pudgy charm of yours is irresistible. Nah. What gets him going more than the girth are faces. He'll

point at a lawyer and say, 'Look how twisted, how soft, how *false*, his face is.' I, of course, am excepted. He said my face was the first thing he checked out."

"Sounds like you're in love with him," said Jansen.

"You know what he says?" Voorhees leaned forward, his voice suddenly intense. "Clients have figured it out, he says. You make money by not only downsizing employees but downsizing your lawyers' asses, too. He asked me how long lawyers thought it would take before everyone figured out you can hire in-house counsel cheap—people like us—to watch over what people like us are doing with your money. Hire in-house counsel who can do the work. He reminded me that a lot of clients are lawyers, too—more than you'd think. They just don't tell you they are, which figures—they're lawyers!"

"The woman who runs the exercise machine at the gym I go to is—I should say was—a lawyer," Urquart said. "She worked a couple of years with the Queens D.A."

"What's that noise?" asked Jansen.

From a distance we could hear the sound of a band becoming louder and louder, until a boat with a salsa band on it—people on the boat dancing to the music—passed by on the river. The music then receded, disappearing as the boat went up the Hudson.

"*What* the *fuck* was *that*?" asked Voorhees.

"The *Fidele*," said Urquart.

"Fidele?" he asked with a shout. "Who? Fidel Castro?"

"It's the name of the boat in Melville's *Confidence-Man*," Urquart said. "I just started reading it—I've only read the first few chapters. It's *very* strange. This one incident—there's a black beggar, a cripple, a freed slave, on a boat, the *Fidele*, on the Mississippi at St. Louis. Before the Civil War. His name is Black Guinea. He's kneeling on the deck, his head thrown back, his mouth wide open, Melville says, like an elephant waiting for tossed apples—that's the way he describes it. People throw coins into this man's mouth like they're pitching pennies. When he catches one, he jingles his tambourine."

"I really have *no* idea what you're talking about," said Voorhees.

"It's a novel," Urquart said. "*The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. Herman Melville. I started reading it after I read—I was rereading it, actually—'Bartleby the Scrivener.' "

"You have time to read?" asked Voorhees.

"I like to read," said Urquart. "So I don't play golf."

"I don't think I've ever read 'Bartleby the Scrivener,' " said Jansen.

"You didn't read it in high school?" asked Voorhees. "It wasn't in your high school English book?"

"Scriveners copied official legal documents," Urquart continued. "Like law clerks today. I think some of them may even have been lawyers. The person telling the story's a bond lawyer. The type, one of those silly people—I had to deal with one the other day, in fact—who come right out and tell you he's successful. His office is at number-dash—capital N, small o, period, for number, then a long dash—Wall Street. I love the dash, don't you? That's the way it's written in the story. Melville didn't want to say exactly where

the office was. His father and brother, apparently, were lawyers. His brother's firm was located at 10 Wall."

"Is 10 Wall still there?" asked Jansen.

"No," said Urquart. "There's no such number anymore. A number 2—the old Bankers Trust building—and a number 14, but no number 10. Melville's father-in-law was a lawyer, too, you know. A very famous lawyer, in fact. He helped support Melville when his career fell apart. Lemuel Shaw."

"Lemuel Shaw?" Jansen exclaimed. "Never in my life did I expect to hear again the name Lemuel Shaw! Herman Melville's father-in-law? Goddamn!"

"Take it easy," said Voorhees. "What are you going to do, go into spasms?"

"It's one of the few things I remember from law school," said Jansen. "We had this professor who taught an opinion Shaw wrote for—I always have to get this right—the Supreme Judicial Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Shaw wrote an opinion that returned a fugitive slave—basically, on jurisdictional grounds—to his owner in one of the Southern states. Shaw was an ardent Abolitionist—which the professor made into a big race thing—which, of course, it was. Shaw was big money. Made himself mucho moola before ascending to the Commonwealth's highest bench. Banking, real estate—today's money, we're talking, easily, two, three mil a year."

"Bartleby, Lemuel. Names you don't hear that much anymore," Voorhees said. "There's a girl—my guess, Puerto Rican—who serves coffee at the Au Bon Pain near my office. The name on her tag is Yesenia."

"I remember now," Jansen said. "Isn't 'Bartleby' the story where the guy keeps saying 'I prefer not'?"

" 'I would prefer not to,' " Urquart said. "He keeps repeating it every time he's asked to do something he doesn't want to do, which becomes a serious problem for his benevolent employer—at least he thinks of himself as benevolent—who tries to get himself out of it. Bartleby ends up starving himself to death in the Tombs. At the end of the story, out of nowhere, the bond lawyer says he'd heard that before Bartleby came to work for him he was a clerk in the dead-letters department for the post office in Washington. Bartleby was fired when there was a change in—he doesn't say which—administrations. Do you know what I liked most about it?"

"The number-dash Wall Street?" asked Voorhees.

"That, too," Urquart said. "No. The obvious. The 'I would prefer not to.' "

"You're not going to get heavy on us, now, are you, Shana?" Jansen said.

"No, I'm not going to get heavy," Urquart said. "When we worked at number-dash Wall Street—Mallorn. Do you remember Mallorn?"

Jansen shook his head. "Mickey Mallorn!"

"Mallorn was it for me. I got assigned to—he was the senior associate—this horrendous real estate case. The client was this old-line real estate family, the Godwins, an old client. A *God*-awful case. Tons of documents, terrible minutiae—I don't know if I've ever told you this. We were plaintiffs—Brownwell Eliot was on the other side. I can't remember a thing about it—it had to do with the terms of a ground lease. A twenty-million-dollar case. Mallorn was in

way, I mean way, over his head. He really didn't know what he was doing. He had me draft a stupid memorandum of law for a discovery motion. The entire strategy was idiotic. I wrote it and he sends it back to me with THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE! across the top. He calls me into his office and tells me I can't write—this is a guy who can't write for shit. He reassigns the memo to another associate—Field, I think."

"Do you think it was a sexual thing?" Voorhees asked. "Mallorn always had trouble controlling his eyeballs."

"His eyeballs were one thing," Urquart said. "His lips, chin, and nose were three square inches of the —I don't know the word to describe it. Boy, now *there* was someone who was physically repulsive. But I don't think that was it. Mallorn knew I thought he was slimy. He used to pad—I mean really pad. He'd bill ten hours on days he did virtually nothing. He knew that I knew he did, too. One time I saw him looking through opposing counsel's briefcase. I learned a lesson." Urquart laughed. "Never leave your briefcase unguarded around a lawyer! I don't know," she continued, then paused. Her voice grew more reflective. "Maybe he had to assert his power. But I really don't think it was that. It was more venal than that. He was a fake, he was a hack. A year away from 'The Big P'—that's how he used to refer to partnership, 'The Big P.' An asshole. A real asshole. So the next time he asks me to do something, I don't do it."

"You, like, just didn't do it?" asked Voorhees.

"No," Urquart said, "I would prefer—it's such a perfect word, isn't it?—not to."

Jansen clapped in mock applause.

"It didn't stop them from making him partner," Voorhees said.

"No," Urquart said, "it didn't."

"I hear he's in deep trouble," Voorhees added. "He's making not a whole lot more than a senior associate. I wonder how Elleridge is?"

"Elleridge!" Jansen exclaimed.

"Never did care too much for old Morton, did you?" said Voorhees.

Jansen was shaking his head slowly, a look of anguish on his face. "God—Morton Elleridge. I'll never forget it. The afternoon of the day Alex Gilchrist was passed over for partner. I was in the john, taking a leak, and Gilchrist was taking a leak, too, when who happens to walk in but the Silver Shithead himself, who steps up to the urinal and asks Gilchrist, 'Well, Alec'—he always called Gilchrist Alec, though his name was Alex—'well, Alec, how are things?' Gilchrist looks at him, his eyes all bloodshot—you could tell he'd been crying. This is your kind of guy who'd go three days without sleep for The Big P. Though destined never to be a member of the firm, Gilchrist happens, urinating, to be holding his own member, when Elleridge says to him, 'Not the large things, Alec. How are the small things?' "

Everyone laughed.

The night air had turned breezy and cool, the sky jet-black except for a thin silver light around the moon and a few patches of dark purple clouds. Jan-

sen asked the waitress for the check, which he picked up. We walked along the esplanade away from the harbor, toward South End Avenue, where there were taxis. Jansen was talking to Voorhees about a deal he was working on. Urquart—an associate counsel for a securities firm—was telling me about her two-year-old, the problems she was having with her nanny—"she's Dominican and has three children of her own"—how tired she is when she comes home from work. Her husband, an investment banker, was under a lot of pressure, too.

"Everything," she said, then paused. "The acceleration. Everything's moving so fast! The mind has to be so fast! It takes so much energy just to find time—any time—to just slow it all down a little. I know that sounds a bit dire, but that's not how I mean it. There's a lot, there really is a lot, of money around—no one has any idea how much there is. But things are contracting at the same time, too. Sometimes I image it. All these pools of money floating around out there—wherever 'there' is. All of us trying to attach ourselves to some part of them whatever way—by ourselves, with others—we can. Wylie. Carl Wylie, for example. Wylie is wherever the money is—Singapore, Mexico City, L.A. The only question is who gets it, and how much, and who helps whom get what. I get my one hundred thousand plus, plus bonus, a year, after the government takes half. Wylie—what difference does it make, and to whom, if Wylie makes seven hundred fifty a year or a million two? I have a friend from high school—she's downtown over here, in one of those small offices in an old office building on Maiden Lane. She does admiralty law. She's with a small admiralty-law firm. I have no idea what admiralty law is. She tells me, opaquely, it has to do with things on boats, on ships. She's attaching herself to a pool of money, too—of a different quality and quantity, that's all. I saw this thing in the paper—a regional plan for the next century. Job banks. You go into a job bank and connect up with a client, anywhere. Where? Tehran?"

"Look!" Voorhees said, as we came to an inlet where several luxury yachts were docked. A balustrade separated the inlet from a plaza between it and the office towers of the World Financial Center, which loomed massively around us. "Words!"

"Words?" Jansen asked. "What about that foreign object on top of that enormous yacht over there. What is *that*?"

"What do you think it is? It's a helicopter," Voorhees said. "Your own tiny, personal helicopter on top of your own huge yacht. Me—I want to know what this says."

He stood where the words, in capital letters, began. "It's some kind of quotation," he said, reading out loud as he walked beside the balustrade. "CITY OF THE WORLD FOR ALL RACES ARE HERE ALL THE LANDS OF THE EARTH MAKE CONTRIBUTIONS HERE CITY OF THE SEA CITY OF . . ."

He stopped. "Over there," he said. He nodded his head toward a man and woman walking across the plaza. "I know him from somewhere. Where do I know him from?"

Urquart turned to Jansen. She asked him to finish

reading where Voorhees left off. He looked ahead, where the quotation ended. "Walt Whitman," he said. "CITY OF THE SEA CITY OF TALL FACADES OF MARBLE AND IRON PROUD AND PASSIONATE CITY METTLESOME MAD EXTRAVAGANT CITY WALT WHITMAN."

All Great Problems Come from the Streets