

## CHAPTER SIX

The next morning Johnny had an early class. He was relieved that it wasn't with Angelique's group. Though she was constantly either in or not far from his thoughts, he needed some time to assimilate what had happened the previous day before seeing her again.

He dropped the children at school and was one of the first teachers to arrive at the psychology department. Not expecting much in his mailbox, he checked it anyway. In fact, there was only one item: a rose-colored envelope with his name printed in large letters. It was marked "Personal and Confidential" in both French and English. Vaguely thankful that Isabelle hadn't arrived yet, he slipped the unusual-looking envelope into his briefcase and headed for his office. A second thought made him detour into the washroom. Locking himself in one of the stalls, he sat on the stool and took out the envelope. He had a strong hunch he knew who the sender was.

Inside there was no word, only a photograph. Johnny caught his breath at the first glance. It was a black and white photo, perfectly clear and contrasty, showing two figures arrayed on a divan. One was lying face up, dressed in a black nun's habit, her hands partly shielding her features. Towering above her, with one knee on either side of her head, knelt a young man, totally naked. He was completely bald, with no trace of hair anywhere on his slim, muscular body, and his stark, white skin glistened in the photographer's floodlight. The striking ravisher was looking down at his quarry, his face mostly concealed by the camera angle, and from his genital area protruded a prodigious prick, sticking straight up, in a stupendous erection. The nun's head was turned towards the camera, and though her hands modestly covered much of her face, Johnny could detect a lascivious smile, and one

intriguing eye looked out through the spread fingers. In a riveting second, that smile became Angelique's, and her peeking eye was peeking straight out at Johnny Begoode.

Mounting panic started his hands shaking, but he couldn't tear his eyes from the photo. He sat staring for a long moment, his legs now trembling and stomach churning sickly until the thought erupted in his brain: "MY GOD SHE'S INSANE!"

He burst from the bathroom. Isabelle was just opening the door to the secretary's office. Isabelle see Johnny. Startled. Worried look. What wrong, Johnny? Johnny feverish, panting. I sick. You go home, Johnny.

Isabelle's smile of greeting quickly turned to a worried look.

"Are you alright, Johnny?" she asked with concern.

He passed a trembling hand on his forehead. "No, I . . . I don't feel well at all, Isabelle. Can . . . can you reschedule my class this morning? Meet them and tell them I'm ill?"

"Sure, Johnny, no problem. You go home and go to bed," she replied sympathetically.

The drive home was oneiric. Thoughts flooded through his boiling brain: "How *sick* she must be! To consent to a pornographic photo like that! And to send it to *me*?"

But thoughts of the photo inevitably took another turn. Burned forever into his brain was the image of that boy and his splendid staff of young manhood, with that beautiful, youthful nun under his assault. He began to wonder whether that colossal cock had shortly been destined to find itself slipping between those sensual lips, those same sweet lips that Johnny had tasted the day before. Or indeed whether that marvelous missile was soon to be buried between those firm, soft thighs the warm pressure of which he could still feel against his own. Or even whether that wondrous weapon would have found its way between those beauteous, taut, tear-

shaped buttocks that, clad in skin-tight jeans, had so enticingly titillated him.

By now on the motorway out of the city, Johnny had to pull into a rest area to have another look at the photograph. It wasn't in his shirt pocket so he must have put it back in the briefcase. A quick search of the latter revealed nothing but his class notes, and panic began mounting again. Oh God, where photo? And envelope? MY NAME! Bathroom? Isabelle found? Jean-Pierre? JESUS CHRIST!!!

And buried deep in that fevered brain, and now working its way inexorably to consciousness, was that mad thought which had been troubling Johnny Begoode for years, and which lately seemed to be surging with regularity: "DID IT REALLY HAPPEN!?"

Suddenly he had to have a cigarette. He hadn't smoked in over ten years, and it had taken him two years of utter misery to liberate himself from the terrible addiction, but he had to have a cigarette. There was a tobacco shop just off the next exit. The first puff made his head swim. He had never tasted anything so foul. He threw the cigarette, the pack and the matches out the window. Desperately, he searched his clothes and briefcase again and again, as if this effort would somehow make the envelope reappear. "It *must* have happened," he thought. "It was too real. Rose-colored. Personal and Confidential in French *and* English? How could I imagine that?" And then he remembered a strange dream he had had a few nights previously. In it he had taken apart an electronic pinball machine. Though he had no knowledge of or particular interest in old, fifties-style pinball machines, here he was disassembling one in a dream. And he knew exactly where the screws and latches were located to remove the cabinet. And once removed he marveled at the incredibly rich and complex mechanical movements and electronic circuitry needed to make the machine function. It was all there, condensers and switches and circuit breakers, down to the most minor detail. "Compared to that," concluded Johnny

Begood feverishly, “a rose-colored envelope and photo are child’s play.

“So that’s what’s going crazy is,” he decided suddenly. “It’s having dreams during the day, when you’re awake. And, sure, they seem all the more real for that. And so the envelope didn’t exist. Did it? And the photograph? And THE KISS???”

As he drove up the road to the farmhouse, he saw Mary in the garden. When she noticed the car she dropped her hoe and walked quickly to meet him.

“Did you forget something?” she asked.

“No . . .”, he hesitated, stepping from the car. “I . . . I don’t feel so hot. Isabelle is going to reschedule my class.”

“What’s wrong? Are you . . .” Suddenly she sniffed the air.

“JOHNNY! Have you been *smoking*?”

“No, no, just a puff. It was horrible. I couldn’t stand it.”

She shook her head in disbelief. “Someone offered you a cigarette and you *took* it!”

“No, no . . . I bought a pack.”

“BOUGHT A PACK!?”

“Forget it. I . . . I threw it away. I . . . I’ve got this really weird student this year . . . a . . . nun.”

“Saints preserve us!” cried Mary, and she couldn’t suppress a laugh.

“And for *that* you want to start smoking again?! After all you – *we* went through to get you off it?! Who *is* this nun, Sister Ignatius reincarnated!?” Her reproachful anger gave way again to a grin.

Johnny leaned heavily against the car door. “Wait. That’s not all. Then there was this guy arguing in English with himself in the bathroom and by now I’m sure everybody

has heard about it. And maybe it was ME! And then there was this envelope, this weird envelope, and then I lost it . . . I think . . . ” And he stopped and looked up and there were tears in his eyes and now for Mary everything was different.

She quickly put her arm around his shoulders. “Whoa, now, ” she said softly, and the concern showed through her eyes. “Take it easy, Johnny. Look, I’m not going to ask you to explain all that. It’s OK, you’re home now. The kids’ll be home for lunch soon. Just take it easy. You’ve been through a lot lately, you know. Your mom died, your manuscripts are in New York. Remember that terrible fight we had last week? It’s OK now, isn’t it? You’re stressed out, that’s all. You’ve got to relax. Who is this horrible nun who’s giving you trouble?”

“No, no . . .no trouble,” said Johnny weakly. “You’re right. Too much happening all at once. I’ve got to relax.”

“That’s right,” said Mary. “You worry about losing an envelope? I lost the damn garbage can the other day. Spent half an hour looking for it. Thought I was going crazy. I mean, how can you lose a huge garbage can? Finally I remembered that I’d put it out for collection that morning. Completely forgot something I’d done only an hour before.”

“Yeah, yeah,” agreed Johnny. “Can happen to anyone.”

“Yeah,” said Mary. “Just relax. You can get through this. Remember when we were living on the Loire and you were having all that trouble with *Mlle* Culraide and your brother George was being a super prick about your mother and that asshole neighbor had those three barking dogs? You got through all *that* didn’t you? Things evolve. And they get better.” She squeezed his arm.

“Yeah,” agreed Johnny half-heartedly. “Things evolve. Get better.”

“Right,” said Mary. “It’s normal. Look, why don’t you do some writing? You’re always more relaxed after you’ve put some time in on the typewriter. You finished Chapter

Five yesterday, didn't you? What better time to begin Chapter Six? Have you got an idea?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Johnny Begoode, wiping a hand across his face and bucking up a bit. "You've given me one. Barking dogs."

Johnny slipped in front of his typewriter as if into a warm bath. A soothing cup of tea at his elbow, he cranked a sheet of paper into the machine, and reflecting on the events of the recent past, he typed out:

CHAPTER SIX. CAGES. PART II.

Johnny Begoode burned to have a book published. About a month before receiving news of his mother's death, he had gone to the post office and sent identical manuscripts to two of the most prestigious publishing houses in New York. Later that day, Johnny was at peace and full of hope. He sat in front of the farmhouse at the picnic table, taking in one of those warm, calm, summer evenings that make the French countryside so enchanting. Mary was in the house playing Monopoly with the children and the frogs in the pond had already begun their nightly serenade. The sky was still streaked with red where the sun had disappeared over the hedgerows, but overhead it had already turned blue-black, and a lone star twinkled. Johnny contemplated the star and automatically a jingle jumped to mind:

"Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight."

He repeated the words silently, just as he had many hundreds of times since first reciting them as a little child. And then, of course, came the wish. In the beginning, when he had first learned the words, he had wished for little boy things: bicycle, erector set, electric train. But when he was about twelve, after his Confirmation, he began to feel guilty about his wish list. The Star Wish seemed too important, too magical and portentous to waste on such selfish desires. And so, from then on, whenever he saw that first lone star in the

evening, he always wished for exactly the same thing: “I hope we all go to heaven.”

But now, with his manuscripts on their way to New York again, it was another moment of truth for Johnny Begoode. And so it seemed quite natural, as he finished reciting the jingle that evening, to change his wish for the first time in thirty years, and he silently prayed instead: “I hope that *Johnny Fuckerfaster* becomes a best-seller.”

Three weeks went by, and Johnny became more and more nervous as he checked the mailbox every day. He calculated that twenty-one days should be about the amount of time necessary to receive the manuscripts, read them, and send out the answer. And sure enough, almost exactly as he had hoped, he came back from the university one day to find notification from the Post Office that two registered letters were waiting for him, and he could pick them up at 9 o'clock the next morning!

His heart leapt in excitement, and he immediately thought of the Star Wish. “It worked!” he thought, and felt a fleeting pang of regret. But exhilaration took over and he ran through the courtyard to tell Mary. “I sold my soul to the devil!” he shouted to the scattering chickens and ducks. “But it worked and it’s worth it! Ha Ha!!!”

He burst into the kitchen and grabbed Mary away from the sink, dancing her around the room, holding the notification high in the air.

After a moment she got him calmed down and he told her about the registered letters waiting at the post office.

“Now what could that be?” she wondered.

“Don’t you see?” he exclaimed, exasperated at her seeming stupidity. “I’ve got two of my manuscripts in New York right now. And they’ve been there almost a month. And today I receive *two* registered letters. *Both* publishers want to take it!”

“That would be quite a coincidence,” she said doubtfully.

“Coincidence! Miracle! It doesn’t matter what you call it!” cried Johnny. “You got to be a believer!”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” she said.

Deflated now by her remarks, Johnny went sulking into the back yard. He watered his bonsais, thought about trimming one of them and headed to the shed for his secateur. But halfway there he lost interest, and began thinking instead about Mary’s remarks: “*That would be quite a coincidence.*” and “*I’ll believe it when I see it.*”

“That’s just it,” he thought resentfully. “She doesn’t understand a goddam thing about the books or what goes into them. *I* put all my guts and energy into manifesting these books and *she* doesn’t believe in them. Now I’m trying to manifest a fucking publisher and *she’s* the one who’s holding me back with her goddam negativity. *I’ve* got to be positive not only for me and my books, I’ve also got to make up for *her* negativity. It’s too goddam much!”

His heart pounding again he strode into the house. Mary was in the kitchen, pulling damp clothes from the washing machine.

“That’s the trouble with you, goddamit,” he began. “You don’t believe it.”

“I believe it, I believe it,” she said calmly, sorting clothes into the basket.

“You *DON’T* believe it, goddamit!” retorted Johnny, heating up. “Just listen to yourself: ‘That would be *QUITE* a coincidence,’” he mocked, exaggerating her words. “I’ll believe it when I *SEEEEE* it,” he sneered.

“Oh, calm down,” she said defensively. “Those are just expressions. Of course I believe it.”

Her calm manner only infuriated him more. His face turned red, his heart raced. He slammed his fist on the table.

“Goddamit don’t you see?!” he shouted. “You THINK you believe it, but the reality is you DON’T! Admit it! Recognize it! It comes out in your comments. The reality is that you’re so goddam negative you’re dragging *me* down.”

He pointed to a copy of a manuscript sitting on the counter. “You think this is EASY goddamit?!” he cried. “What do you know about it? You don’t understand a fucking thing of what I write! I put my fucking guts into this, you bitch! You make me so goddam mad . . .”

“Oh, shut up!” she said, now showing anger. “Just shut up. I don’t make you mad. You make yourself mad. You . . .”

“Don’t tell ME to shut up, GODDAM YEW!!” Shaking with fury he picked the fruit bowl off the table, raised it high over his head and slammed it on the floor. Apples and bananas and shards of terra-cotta exploded across the room and Johnny stomped out. Mary stood shocked for a moment, then slumped into a chair, covering her face with her hands, choking a sob.

“I HATE YOU!” screamed Johnny from the living room. “GO TO HELL YOU GODDAM BITCH! GO TO HELL! GO TO HELL!!!” The front door slammed with such force that the whole house shook.

Once outside Johnny calmed down. He went back to the garden and began weeding the lettuce. After a few minutes he headed slowly back to the kitchen. The floor had been swept. The fruit was back on the table in a salad bowl. Mary was sitting quietly. She looked up at him.

“We bought that fruit bowl in Sicily, remember?” she said sadly.

“Yeah, yeah, I remember,” he said chastened. “That’ll be a good reason to go back there.”

“When?” she asked.

“Listen,” he said. “When I get mad like that I lose all control. You should know that by now. Don’t piss me off like that. Just let it drop. My ranting and raving don’t hurt anything, but if you resist it really burns me up. I don’t know what’s going on. This thing is like riding on the top of a wave. It’s great as long as you stay on top. But if the wave catches up . . . You’ve got to help me stay on top. It’s hard enough to believe . . . I can’t believe for both of us . . . I’m trying to . . . to . . . *pondre* this thing. *Il faut que ça ponde! Tu comprends?*”

For the first time in years Johnny had trouble sleeping that night. He lay and watched the luminous digits of the clock change as hundreds of fantasies danced in his head. “Which one should I take? The one that gives me the best terms, of course. Lots of things to think about: advance, percentage, promotions, tours, foreign and paperback rights. Need an agent. Should be easy enough to get one since I already have a publisher. *Two publishers!*”

And when sleep finally came, his dreams carried him off to New York City. He was lionized. Parties with Mailer and the rest. Fancy restaurants with fat publishers. Adoring groupies.

The next morning he was standing in front of the little post office in the small village his farm depended on. It was several minutes past nine and the door was still locked. Finally the old postmistress appeared from the back, and after some struggle managed to unlock the door. Johnny flew to the counter, but then had to wait patiently as the old lady moved like molasses around the office, cranking up the shutters, straightening up the telephone books. Finally, she accepted his notification, pulled the two letters from a file box, placed them on her desk, and began completing the paperwork entailed by the registration.

Johnny strained to see the envelopes, but they were too far away to distinguish the printing. But then he realized that they were both the same size and shape and his heart began sinking. It sank further when he made out what appeared to

be French postage, and hit bottom when the letters were placed in front of him and he saw the return address as U.S. Embassy, Paris.

When he walked in the door Mary saw how crushed he was, and so refrained from asking any questions. In fact the letters concerned some banal passport business.

Johnny was embarrassed by his flaming optimism. "I guess I never learn, eh?" he remarked to Mary later that day. "The trouble is, sending these manuscripts is getting too goddam expensive. Maybe I should go back to trying inquiry letters first. But then I'll *never* send any manuscripts, will I?" he concluded in disgust.

When he first tried to sell *Johnny Fuckerfaster*, some years previously, he would send inquiries in groups of five or ten, hitting all the major New York publishers and many smaller houses. "Dear Sir," went a typical letter, "Can I interest you in reading a manuscript?"

"A few words about myself: I'm an American, and have been living in France a number of years. I earned a doctorate from the Sorbonne and am presently teaching English at a provincial university here.

"A few words about the book: The protagonist is an expatriate American obsessed with pornographic films, and his compulsion precludes his finding happiness in the idyllic life he has made for himself and his family in rural France. He reflects on his growing up sexually absurd in the America of the fifties. The book has been called "an excellent work" by a distinguished professor of contemporary American literature at the Sorbonne. It has about seventy thousand words.

"I have enclosed a self-addressed envelope and one dollar in cash to cover postage for what I hope will be an early reply. I am, Sincerely yours, J. Begoode."

In those days Johnny's naiveté about this business was total, and the disillusionments came regularly. Eventually he

fell into the clutches of one of the lowest creatures on earth, the agent who reads manuscripts for money. Johnny learned the hard way that these bloodsuckers feed off the vanities of all who believe that they can write a book. By extremely clever promotional material they convince the unwary author that, for a price, they can all but guarantee publication of the book. These unscrupulous parasites pay their office expenses with the hard-earned cash of easy pigeons like Johnny, so whatever they make on commissions from their established authors is gravy. Of course, some sheep more or less deserve to be fleeced, but Johnny and his family could ill-afford to finance some vermin's high-living lifestyle. When he finally came to his senses and realized that he had been scammed, Johnny's first thought was that he had financed this swindler's \$500 Gucci shoes while the shoes on his children's feet were falling apart.

Nevertheless, he kept careful records of his correspondence, though most of the agents, the "honest" ones, never even replied. In his darker moments, when the obsessional resentments took charge, he imagined the scenario: the fat, cigar-chomping agent sitting in his plush office, the neophyte feminist novelist on her knees under his desk, sucking his cock. Bored, the agent is simultaneously going through his mail. He opens Johnny's letter. Without even bothering to read it, he tosses the letter, envelope and return envelope into the wastebasket, slips the dollar bill into his greasy trousers pocket, and reaches for the next letter.

Finally Johnny decided to target particular publishers and to send his manuscripts unsolicited. He figured that with a little luck one of them might actually be read. But with the overseas postage, it was an expensive lottery.

And yet through all this discouragement, battered and bloody ego, wallet emptied by unethical agent, Johnny kept on writing. He finished his second novel and was well into his third. Writing became more and more important to him. He quit seeing most of his friends, never accepted invitations. He knew of no one to whom he could talk about the craft; he

didn't want to let just anyone read what he had written. He was terrified that he was failing at the thing he desired most. He felt that his whole life had been a preparation for this, the realization of a dream he'd nurtured ever since he'd written his first childish novel at the age of twelve.

As the rejections continued to pour in he cut himself off from the world more and more. He went to the university only to teach his classes, avoided colleagues when he was there, began to paranoically insist that Mary answer the phone even if he was sitting next to it and she was in the bathtub. He withdrew into his shell, tap-tapping on the typewriter every evening until past midnight.

Most of Johnny's friends found it easy to forget about him when he seemed to go out of his way to avoid them and didn't accept their invitations. But the cruel truth is that they were mediocre people, mostly content in their little niches, and none of them could have recognized his talent even if he had been willing to show them his work. Yet, those same colleagues would have said that Begoode himself appeared to be the least ambitious of men, content to teach English to first-year students on a part-time basis, happy to putter in his garden and visit with his bees, rear his children and make his cheese.

Of course, Johnny was aiming much higher than any of them had ever dreamed of. Head of the department would never have satisfied Johnny, nor would the presidency of the university, nor even president of France if that were conceivable. Johnny wanted much more. He wanted to join the ranks of those august *littérateurs* who have achieved immortality through their pens. He wanted to burst onto the literary scene like Athena from the head of Zeus, a world-class writer, fully armed, with nothing to learn.

The few friends whom Johnny had frequented over the years tended towards the marginal like himself. One of these was an old Norwegian woman who, for the past fifty years, had been dividing her residence between France in the winter and Norway during the summer. She was a translator, and the

closest thing to a writer that Johnny knew. She had translated more than 150 books from Norwegian into French, some of them best-sellers.

Johnny was not particularly interested in translations, nor in the mystical religion that the woman practiced. But they had met some years previously through a common friend, and Johnny had become accustomed to helping her with household chores. She was over seventy years old, and though lively of mind and spirit, there were many things she couldn't do herself in the upkeep of her roomy, old bourgeois apartment in town.

In turn she had tried to help Johnny, or thought she had. Shortly after making his acquaintance, for example, she had tried to advance his career at the university by inviting him to dinner with several influential professor friends of hers. Kristin and her guests talked about public education the whole evening while Johnny suffered in silence. He was interested in Gurdjieff at that time, and his thoughts throughout the meal were dominated by Ouspensky's words about how people lie all the time, usually unintentionally, but they lie nonetheless. When the others had gone home and Kristin and Johnny were doing the washing up, she mildly reproached him:

"Why didn't you speak up, for heaven's sake? You sat there like a bump on a log all evening. You've got to show these people some spunk if you want a better job."

"I really didn't have anything to say," he replied meekly.

But what he wanted to reply was: "Why should I join in that fucking debauchery of lying? What do these pretentious idiots really know about public education? What does anybody know? They spout a few clichés they've picked up, and a few meaningless anecdotes from their own very limited experience. Add some speculation and a little gossip and what have you got? *Bullshit!* Don't you know that people *lie* all the time? Think about it. The next time you're about to affirm something, *anything*, think about it. Is it *true?* *Really* true? You stick me in the company of a bunch of assholes

who devote most of their time to mental masturbation and who suffer from bouts of diarrhea of the mouth and you want me to LIKE IT? JOIN IN??"

But Johnny often thinks things like that. And never says them.

After that evening, Johnny avoided his friend Kristin for several months. He didn't call to see if she needed any work done around the apartment, or inquire about her health. He swore to himself that he'd never see her again. He admitted that she was a very nice lady, but he just didn't want to be with her, or with anyone else. He was writing about his past now, like most debutant authors, and much of it was emotion-wracked and often disagreeable, if not painful, to recall.

At that time he was living with Mary in a tiny, two-room cottage that they had bought and were restoring in a little village on the Loire. Since Johnny only had a few hours teaching each week, he spent most of his days lovingly bringing the little house back to the way it appeared when it was built in the sixteenth century. In the evenings he sat at his typewriter and worked on his novel, and through the window he would watch the swallows circling and darting through the peaceful village. Since the children hadn't been born yet, and they had no television, Mary was free to read or sew or put up preserves.

But their blissful happiness was disrupted when a crude man with three loud dogs bought the vacant house next door to them and moved in. Within a few days the constant barking, yowling, and yapping was at the point of driving them crazy, especially Johnny, who found it almost impossible to write at home anymore. But the man refused to do anything about it, and moreover was very unpleasant.

At about this time he ran into Kristin by chance, not far from her apartment.

"Where've you *been*?" she admonished him, not too gently. She was a pretty salty old lady.

“Nowhere,” he answered without enthusiasm. “Home, I guess.”

“*Infidèle*,” she chided him. “Why don’t you come around?”

“I . . . I don’t go *anywhere*,” he said lamely. “Haven’t seen *anybody*. It’s . . . nothing personal. I . . . I’ve been *writing*,” he suddenly burst out.

“Writing?” she said, raising an eyebrow. “That’s interesting, Johnny. I didn’t know you wrote. What are you writing?”

“Oh, you know,” he said lightly, trying now to dismiss it, “what most beginning writers write about. Themselves.” In spite of his effort to be offhand, his face was flushed and his heart pounded. He dreaded the inevitable question that even now was forming on her lips:

“When can I read it?”

“Well, as . . . as soon as it’s finished, I guess. If you want.”

“I insist!” she said, and he knew she meant it. She invited him for lunch the following week, and cautioned him to bring, if not a completed manuscript, at least some pages she could read and criticize.

“Kristin wants to read my book,” he announced dejectedly to Mary when he arrived home.

“Oh, that’s great!” she said, ironically. “You told her? What are you going to do now?”

“Should I let her read it?” he asked.

“Are you kidding?” she laughed.

Johnny sat down at his desk. He stared out the window at the river. The dogs barking and whining next door made a tightening in his stomach. He couldn’t show her *Johnny Fuckenfaster*, that was sure. It was nothing like the benign travel and adventure books she usually translated. With its

torrid sex and debauchery, it might put the old lady in her grave. But he'd have to show her something. He uncovered his typewriter and began to reflect. There was a strange thing in the courtyard of her apartment house that had not only captured his attention but also given him considerable thought in the past. He began to type:

The Cage

When Johnny first saw the cage it muddled his mind. There was nothing in his bank of associations to match it with. It was sort of like coming across a live rhinoceros in a bookshop. He stood there dumbfounded while his friend, for whom the cage was an everyday sight, took no notice and went about the errand that had brought them into the courtyard and to the feet, as it were, of the monstrosity.

“What’s *that*?” he asked, without turning his eyes from it.

Johnny’s friend didn’t hear the question. She was an older lady, somewhat hard of hearing, for whom he did little chores from time to time like replacing washers in leaky faucets and other things that she couldn’t do herself. She seemed happy to see him that morning since he hadn’t stopped by for several months despite her telephoning occasionally to invite him for lunch. He had come now to retrieve a hacksaw that he’d forgotten on his last visit. She had answered the doorbell to find him standing on the landing, face flushed, feet shuffling, sheepishly avoiding her stern stare.

“Where’ve you *been*?” she admonished him, not too gently. She was a pretty salty old lady.

“Nowhere,” he answered without enthusiasm. “Home, I guess.”

“*Infidèle*” she chided him. “Why don’t you come around?”

“I . . . I don’t go *anywhere*,” he said lamely. “Haven’t seen *anybody*. It’s . . . it’s nothing personal. I . . .”



“What are you going to do about it?” she asked.

“I’m thinking about dynamite,” he said.

“*Voilà!*” she cried, pulling the saw from the pile.

As they were leaving the courtyard Johnny took her arm. “Does anyone *live* there?” he asked, pointing to the cage.

“A lady used to live there,” she replied, “until a couple of years ago. Now it’s abandoned.”

Back in her apartment they drank tea and talked about books. Johnny taught English at the local university and his friend was a translator who had rendered scores of books from Norwegian into French, including some best-sellers. She divided her residency each year between France and her beloved Bergen, coming south only when the light failed in the fjords. Johnny was one of her younger American friends with whom she spoke English, but she had many friends of different nationalities and ages.

As he was leaving she squeezed his hand. “I hope you can live tranquilly in that cute little house in spite of those dogs,” she said. “and you must come back soon. I’ve got a couple of things that need doing around here.”

He flushed, embarrassed. “I’ll be back soon,” he said. “Make a list.”

Back home he immediately went to work, cutting some copper tubing. Although it was a tiny house they had bought, it needed a lot of restoring. He was grateful for the shrill screeching of the saw as it momentarily drowned out the whining of the dogs next door. But each time he paused and the calm descended, the barking and whimpering came muffled through the wall. And with it came the stomach-twisting hatred of that banal, blank-faced man who had brought misery into his life. Then he would attack the pipe again with a vengeance, picturing that face as the saw ripped ferociously into the metal: “*J’adore . . . mes . . . chiens.*”

When the sawing was finished the dogs were still whimpering. He tried reading for a while but couldn't get into it. So he resorted to his usual tactic of putting on a Rolling Stones record and turning up the stereo full blast. The sounds filtered out of the house – an incongruous intrusion into the timeless, cobblestoned streets of the little Loire village.

That evening was spent as all recent evenings had been, with Johnny and Mary sitting around with long faces that alternately reflected sadness, frustration and hatred as the dogs whined incessantly. Johnny tried reading Balzac with the stereo headphones masking the howling, but concentration was difficult so he finally gave up and went to bed. There were usually some hours of peace during the night while the dogs slept.

After a fitful night's sleep Johnny woke up and found he could think of nothing but that cage and the lady who had occupied it. Even the dogs were momentarily forgotten. He held off until a reasonable hour so as not to wake his friend, then got into his car and drove back to town.

Before going up to her apartment, he went out to the courtyard to see the cage again. His face took on a pained expression this time as he began to study the details: steel-framed, door-size sections of heavy wire fencing were bolted together to form a massive cage which completely enclosed, from cobblestones to roof, the façade of the narrow, two-storey stone house and adjoining garage. Heavy steel gates set in the wire gave access to both buildings. Even the flower parterres in front of the house were included in the cage which followed their form exactly. Rust showed in spots where the pale green paint had flecked off the fencing, giving the whole thing an abandoned, run-down look, as forlorn as a decrepit birdcage without its occupant. Johnny stared for a few minutes, studying the construction, marvelling at what it must have cost, trying to imagine the lady. Then he climbed the stairs to Kristin's apartment and rang the bell.

She opened the door.

“Can this be Johnny Begoode?” she asked with mock disbelief. “This is incredible! Weren’t you here just yesterday?”

He ignored her jesting sarcasm.

“Tell me about the lady in the cage,” he said.

She poured the tea with steady hand in spite of her years. “She damn near drove us all nuts,” she said in colloquial American. “All the neighbors breathed a sigh of relief when they came to get her. It was *hell* having her around here.”

“What was she like?” he asked.

“Well,” she said reflectively, as if really thinking about it for the first time, “I guess what was truly amazing about it all was the transformation. You see, I’d lived next to her for – what? – twelve years before the trouble started. At first she was a very pleasant neighbor, Johnny. She never talked much – seemed kind of a nervous type – but she always had a smile and a friendly ‘*bonjour*’ for everyone. I wouldn’t say she was an ‘open’ person, I mean she’d get uncomfortable if the conversation went beyond the weather, but she wasn’t completely ‘closed’ either.”

She paused to take a sip of tea, then continued: “But then I began to notice that she often seemed preoccupied. Whenever I tried to exchange pleasantries – you know how it is between neighbors – she would simply nod and go on about her business. Anyway, I could see that something was going on in her mind. Sometimes we’d pass in the courtyard and she wouldn’t even *see* me she was so lost in her head. I thought maybe she was having trouble with her family although I’d always known her to live alone and she never seemed to be very close to her relatives. Well, she finally stopped saying ‘*bonjour*’ and for a while the smile was forced and then she quit smiling altogether. It was like a curtain had come down over her face, as if she were trapped in her own mind, if you know what I mean.”

Johnny nodded and she continued: “And then she just broke off with everybody. Even her family. There were times when her daughters or sister came to visit and she didn’t answer the door, although I knew she was home. They’d come to see me because they knew that I had been friendly with her. ‘She doesn’t answer her door,’ they’d tell me ‘She doesn’t answer her mail or telephone.’

“What could I say? ‘She only comes out to buy food once in a while,’ I’d tell them. ‘Maybe she just wants to be *tranquille*.’ They’d go away mumbling.

“And then the complaining began. At first her complaints were more or less legitimate, and she wasn’t particularly nasty about it: this neighbor’s kid stepping into her flowers to chase a ball, that neighbor’s kid leaning his bike up against her garage door, someone neglecting to bring in their trash can after the garbage men passed, that sort of thing. But before long the *screaming* began, and generally about nothing at all. Oh, Lord, it was awful! If she found a cigarette butt or scrap of paper in the courtyard she’d begin screaming about what a bunch of pigs the neighbors were. If somebody had the radio or TV on after nine p.m., even down low mind you, she’d be screaming up the stairwell. I couldn’t play the piano, even in the afternoon, without her hollering at me to shut up. ‘*LA PAIX, LA PAIX, NOM DE DIEU!*’ she’d be screaming all the time. And, of course, nobody had *any* peace, least of all her. She screamed about the kids playing in the courtyard, at the mailman for leaving her junk mail, at the yapping of first-floor lady’s dog. It was *infernal*.”

“And the cage?” asked Johnny.

“Let’s see,” she reflected. “That was about a year before they came for her. About three years ago.” She uttered a harsh laugh. “At first nobody around here could believe it. One morning workmen arrived with a truck full of sections of steel cage. By the end of the second day the house was . . . how can I say it? – *encagée*. They laughed and joked about it the whole time, the workmen did. In fact, there *was* something horribly funny about it. Everybody was laughing,

at least in the beginning. Oh, we all knew she was crazy by that time. But it was her house, her money, what could anyone do? It must have cost a fortune, all that steel and wire, all that work.”

“But did she calm down then?” .

“No, she just got worse. Before she had the cage built the neighborhood kids would play tricks on her and dog her steps when she went to the market, but now they *really* had a reason to tease her. *Torment* would be a better word. They’d beat on her cage and throw rocks and sticks inside. She’d come snarling out of the house, shaking a fist, screaming to be left alone. It was ghastly. I’d chase them away myself, when I could.

“Her daughters and sister came by almost every day then, rattling the cage door, demanding to be let in, calling her all kinds of frightful names, yelling about how she’d disgraced the family and wasted her money and so on. Of course, she never answered them.” She shook her head slowly with an ironic smile. “The more she tried to cut herself off, the more people hounded her.”

Johnny got up and walked to the window that gave out on the courtyard. His friend followed him with her eyes. He could see only the corner of the cage.

“She just wanted to be left alone,” said Kristin.

“And then they came for her?” asked Johnny.

“Believe it or not it went on for months,” she said. “I don’t know how we all put up with it. At that point she almost never left the cage. What little food she ate she had delivered. As I made it out, she subsisted mostly on bread and tea. Finally her sister came by with a social worker. The lady took one look and that was the end. The next day they were back with an ambulance and some firemen to break open the cage door. They carried her out strapped on a stretcher.”

“And you never saw her again?” he asked.

“Just once,” she replied. “But I wish I hadn’t. A few weeks after her . . . departure . . . her daughter came by and asked me if I’d take some of her mother’s personal effects to the hospital. She thought that since the poor woman wouldn’t see anyone else she might agree to see me and it could do her some good. Well, have you seen the psychiatric hospital here, Johnny? It looks more like a prison. There’s this huge, gothic front gate right out of Victor Hugo – thirty-foot walls all around the place – practically had to threaten the beastly guard to get in – found out she was in the maximum security pavilion all the way at the end of the grounds – was ready for a wheelchair myself by the time I got there – nurse said they had her under twenty-four surveillance – said her kind often try to hurt themselves – or others – the building was *so* horrible . . .”

She shook her head and grimaced at the memory of it, then continued, her words coming more slowly, her voice growing raucous.

“High, barred windows – sad, broken people shuffling down dim corridors in ratty slippers – walls painted pukey green – flaking off in places. She was in the dayroom. I couldn’t believe what I saw. The dayroom was divided from the rest of the pavillion by a thick, wire screen that went from floor to ceiling. In fact, you know . . .” She got up to join Johnny at the window, looking out to the courtyard. “. . . it was a cage.”

Her eyes seemed to dim as she paused to recollect, then she continued:

“There must have been about thirty of them in there. I’ve seen some sad sights in my seventy years, my boy, but nothing like this – looked and sounded like a zoo – women of all types and ages, sitting, standing, lying down, walking around – some silent, some moaning, some complaining – laughing, bragging, praying – one was howling like a dog. And, Oh Lord, there she was!” her voice tightened with emotion. “There she was right in the middle of them – sitting on a stool – surrounded by that purgatorial misery – her old,

gray head hanging down – Hugo never looked upon such a miserable sight.”

Johnny felt her hand tightening on his shoulder. She continued:

“The nurse unlocked the gate and brought her out. I handed her the bag from her daughter. She looked at me like I came from another world.”

“Did she say anything?” Johnny asked.

“Yes. One thing.”

From the corner of his eye he saw her lip quiver, her eyes fill with tears. “She said:

‘I just want to be left alone.’”

Johnny stood in the doorway, preparing to leave. She took his hand and squeezed it affectionately. At the same time she raised a sarcastic eyebrow and told him sternly:

“Now don’t bother coming around again tomorrow, Johnny Begoode, because I won’t be here. On the other hand, don’t wait a year and a half to come back. I’ve got some things around here that need the attention of a handyman.”

He flushed, embarrassed. “I’ll be back soon,” he said uncomfortably. “Make a list.”

Later that afternoon Johnny sat dejectedly by the window in his kitchen, reflecting about his visit to Kristin, looking out beyond the neighbor’s house to the river. The dogs were whining and howling. In his cute little cottage on the Loire Johnny wanted just one thing. He wanted to be left alone. THE END.

Revising and retyping his story kept him up until past midnight. Early the next morning he dropped it into her mailbox, and though he wanted to hurry away in case he might run into her, he couldn’t resist going out to the courtyard for another look. Weeds grew high in the parterres and intertwined in the heavy links of the fencing. As he

contemplated the cage, Johnny felt reassured about his story. “There is no way Kristin can’t appreciate this story,” he thought. “It’s about a phenomenon in her own courtyard. She’s got the principal role. I put my *guts* into it!”

The following Wednesday Johnny arrived for his luncheon date with Kristin. He had to ring several times. Her hearing had gotten so bad that she’d had to have a light installed in the living room that flashed repeatedly when the doorbell rang. If she didn’t hear the doorbell she’d usually notice the light. But sometimes it took a while.

While he waited Johnny thought about the story. Could she have been offended, he wondered. He remembered now that he had mentioned her deafness, and had described her as a “salty old lady.” In fact, he had half expected that she would telephone him after she finished the story. He’d looked forward to a call, but dreaded it at the same time. He wanted to hear her sing the praises of his effort, tell him how much it had moved her, how she understood him better now, maybe even that it had made her weep. On the other hand it was almost impossible to carry on a telephone conversation with her, though her phone was equipped with an amplifier.

But she hadn’t called. And now he waited for her to answer the door. Would she be angry? Disgusted? In any case it *must* have impressed her. *It must have!*

She opened the door with a smile and invited him in. Johnny’s heart was hammering as he walked past her into the living room. The little table was set for two. He whirled around, the question on his lips.

“Well,” he said nervously, “what did you think of it?”

She didn’t hear the question. She had turned to pick up a book from the piano. Johnny was about to repeat himself when suddenly an oppressive feeling of futility came over him. He let it drop.

“Oh, Johnny,” she said enthusiastically, “do you know this book? It’s a modern interpretation of the Beatitudes.

Absolutely marvelous. It's changed my life! It cuts through all the anachronistic language and really makes it clear. You absolutely must take it and read it!" She thrust it into his hands.

During lunch she did all the talking. She talked about that beatitude book, about her new yoga teacher, about the needy family she was helping out financially. Johnny ate silently, nodding his head, only half listening, thinking about his story. As they finished their coffee, he decided the time had come. "Did . . ." he began, but he was suddenly silenced by the bell and flashing light.

"Oh, that's Brigitte," she said, getting up from the table. "She's supposed to take me shopping."

Johnny got up. She put her hand on his shoulder.

"I hate to rush you out," she said.

He started towards the door, then stopped. Blushing awkwardly, he blurted out:

"Did . . . did you read the manuscript I put in your mailbox?"

"Oh . . . yes!" she said, as if suddenly remembering something she had tried very hard not to forget. "Yes, yes, of course!"

"What did you think of it?" asked Johnny.

"It was . . ." An uncomfortable smile appeared on her lips. "It was *très amusant*," she said. The bell rang again.

Now Johnny wanted only one thing. He wanted to get his hands on that manuscript. He asked her for it. She told him she'd find it and give it to him next time. Very much out of character, he insisted that he needed it now. She sent him to answer the door while she went to look for it in her bedroom. Brigitte came in smiling and headed straight to the kitchen to make a list of needed provisions. Johnny waited by the door, mouth dry and palms sweating. Finally Kristin

reappeared and placed the story in his hands with an indulgent smile. He felt a tremendous oppression lift slightly.

He stood in the doorway, preparing to go. She took his hand and squeezed it affectionately. At the same time she raised a sarcastic eyebrow and told him sternly:

“Now don’t wait a year and a half to come back, Johnny Begoode. I’ve got some things around here that need the attention of a handyman.”

He flushed, embarrassed. “I’ll be back soon,” he said uncomfortably. “Make a list.”

He hurried down the stairs, taking them two at a time. At the bottom of the stairwell he paused, then slipped out to the courtyard to take one last look at the cage. He knew he wouldn’t be back.

On his way home he saw himself standing before her door once more, ringing the bell. Riiinnnggggg. RRRRIIIIIIIINNNNNNNGGGGGG. Ringing the bell and nobody answering. Ringing, ringing, ringing the bell. No answer.

Finally, she opened the door. Johnny’s heart was pounding. She had a strange expression on her face. She’d never looked at him like that before. She took him by the arm and led him into the apartment, shut the door, put her hands on his shoulders and looked him intensely in the eyes. He flushed.

“Oh, Johnny,” she said in hushed awe, shaking her head in disbelief, tears filling her eyes. “You’re an artist . . . I didn’t know . . . *tu es un maître* . . . it’s . . . it’s a masterpiece. I never . . .”

“Did you like it?” he asked, a relieved smile crossing his face.

“*Like* it?” she asked incredulously. “*LIKE IT?* Oh, Johnny, you naïve boy! That’s not the word. It was beautiful, a poem . . . you captured her perfectly, the lady in the cage. I

. . . I won't let you put yourself in a cage. I'll talk to my publisher. I know an agent. Talent like yours must – *will* – be recognized . . .”

When he got home, Mary was in the kitchen putting up tomatoes. He flopped heavily into his armchair, letting out a loud sigh that brought her into the living room, smiling, wiping her hands on a dishtowel.

“Did she like it?” she asked.

“She didn't understand a fucking thing,” said Johnny Begoode.

He suddenly felt Mary's presence in the room, then her hands, gently from behind, on his shoulders.

“Almost time for lunch,” she said, and now he could hear the children's excited voices outside. She looked at the page in his typewriter. “How's it going?”

“Not bad,” he replied. “I've been mulling this one around for quite a while – it's flowing pretty good. Chapter Six will be finished before long.

“Need a smoke?” she asked smilingly.

“No, no,” he replied sheepishly. “That was just a moment of craziness. I'm not . . .”

RRRIIIIIINNNNNNNNGGGGGGGGG

“Phone!” said Mary, heading for the stairs. A moment later she was back.

“It's for you.”

“Who is it?” he asked.

“Nobody I know. It must be a student. She sounds young, and . . .” she added with a saucy smile “. . . sexy!”

“Hello?” said Johnny.

“Johnny! . . . Mister Begoode . . . Johnny . . .” stammered Angelique.

“Jesus Christ!” he hissed, recognizing her at once, keeping his voice low. “Why are you calling me here? And why the *hell* did you send me that photograph?! Are you CRAZY??!!”

There was a pause, then a loud sob.

“Oh, God, I’m sorry!” she lamented. “I can’t . . . can’t help . . . Can I see you? I can explain . . .”

“What’s to *explain*?” he asked, regaining a bit of composure. “How the hell could you possibly explain *that*?! What are you trying to *do*?!”

“Can I meet you in your office?” she asked meekly. “Right away?”

“Hell no!” he replied, heating up again. “I was there this morning – missed my class – the secretary thinks I’m sick – that really—shook me up, you know! How . . .”

“Can I meet you in your office this afternoon?”

“No, no. I’m not going back to town today. I’ve got to think . . .”

“How about tomorrow?” Her voice, at first subdued and contrite, now began to take on a sexily seductive cast, and Johnny felt his resistance slipping away. He hesitated. Upstairs he could hear the muted humming of Mary’s sewing machine. The image of the photo flashed on his mind’s eye – the virile young man doted with a magnificent prick, the lovely young nun about to be ravished.

“Tomorrow,” he said. “Tomorrow morning. Nine o’clock.”

“Nine o’clock,” she repeated. “Tomorrow. Goodbye, Johnny.” And he heard her add in a strangled voice just before the click: “I love you.”

All afternoon Johnny worked feverishly on his novel. He felt instinctively that he was approaching a cusp, and it was imperative that he finish it now. There was one more

chapter and an epilogue to write. He also thought he might be able to exorcise Angelique from his mind by transferring her to the page. But first there were two more topics to be treated. One of them he had already written as a short story so he only had to revise it a bit to include it in the novel. In fact, it could serve to introduce Chapter Seven. But again, Chapter Six would have to be finished first. So he stayed in his room that evening, passing up supper, typing, revising, retyping.

That night his sleep was troubled. There was a dream – the succuba passed, maybe in the guise of Angelique. In any case he awoke feeling covered with pixie dust, having been savagely fucked in his dreams by a wildly erotic pixie.

He got up early and took a long shower, and in an unusual gesture, doused his whole body in cologne. Mary knew he had no class that day so he used the pretext of going to the agricultural cooperative store to get out of the house. He arrived on campus twenty minutes early and headed for the library with a stack of books. Perhaps he felt that something so prosaic as returning overdue books could restore some normality into a life situation that was clearly getting out of hand. Unfortunately, he ran into *Frère* Fierot on his way up the library steps.

“Mister Begoode,” the *frère* acknowledged him with distaste.

“You finally remembered my name,” said Johnny sarcastically, intent now on keeping himself on the same footing with his obnoxious enemy.

“That’s not all I’ll remember,” said Fierot menacingly. “I’ll remember your impertinence next month when we’re called upon to vote on your permanent post.”

Johnny felt as if the man had struck him a sharp blow to the stomach. Of course it was his long-standing request for tenure the *frère* was alluding to. He had dreamed of it for years. It meant more pay, job security, more interesting classes.

“I . . . I haven’t been informed of anything,” said Johnny weakly.

“The letters are going out tomorrow, *Mister Begoode*,” he said sneeringly. “Being recently delegated chairman of the committee, I wrote them myself, *Mister Begoode*. And,” he added ominously, “I’ll just let you guess how ‘the little worm’ is going to vote.” He said the expression in English, and gave Johnny a triumphant look.

In one sharp jolt of despair, Johnny realized his career at the university was definitively compromised, so he had nothing to lose. The hate for his nemesis boiled up in him, and summoning his best colloquial French, he spat out:

“I don’t give a goddam how the fucking *little worm* votes! Why don’t you go kiss *Mlle Culraide*’s ass? You’re both made of the same *shit!*”

The color drained from Fierot’s face. Certainly in all his years he had never been spoken to in that way before. Scandalized again, he hurried off down the stairs.

Johnny suddenly felt sick. Now it was no longer a question of tenure, but simply keeping his job. How could he explain all this to Mary? She, too, had been anxious for him to get the tenure that would have made their future more secure. And now he had the second most powerful person in the university hating his guts, and Fierot would surely be set on getting him fired. Would Jean-Pierre stick up for him? As head of the apostate Psychology Department, he wasn’t that popular with the administration, either.

Questions and doubts continued to plague Johnny as he dropped off the books and headed for his office. He had almost forgotten about Angelique. She was waiting outside his door. He gave her an impersonal “*bonjour*” and avoided her eyes as he unlocked the office, but once inside the door had barely closed before she had her arms around him, her mouth greedily devouring his. Johnny just let it happen.

“Mmmmmmmmm, you smell good,” she breathed when they broke off. He motioned for her to sit down, then dropped heavily into his chair behind the desk.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, her lovely eyes wide with innocence.

“What’s wrong,” repeated Johnny languidly. “Well, except for the fact that there’s a pornographic photo of a nun floating around someplace in this ultra-Catholic university, and it’s got my name on it . . . and that I’ve just insulted, in exceedingly flagrant and gross terms, one of the most powerful people in the place, and incidentally, the chairman of the committee reviewing my request for tenure . . . and that the most beautiful, seductive, and totally crazy student I’ve ever had seems to be intent on fucking me and ruining my career and marriage into the bargain. . . and now if you discount the circumstance that my mother just died and I’m in the midst of a mid-life crisis, well, otherwise everything is fine.”

“You *lost* the photograph?” she asked, eyebrows going up. “Oh, God!”

“If you hadn’t put it in my mailbox I wouldn’t have lost it,” he said, putting his elbows on the desk and burying his face in his hands.

“Oh, Johnny, I’m so sorry,” she said deplorably. “You were so kind to me – like my father – I . . . I guess I wanted to punish myself – or to show you what I’m really like – why I was excused from the convent – I . . . I can’t help myself – I need help – will *you* help me?”

He spread his fingers and peeked out at her. Angelique’s eyes were wet with tears, but on her lips was a discreet smile that nevertheless was radiant in its beauty and surreal in its intensity. He shut his fingers, then slowly spread them and peeked out at her again, much the way she had peeked at him from the photo. Playfully, he did it once more, and this time no irony was lost on either of them. Angelique’s smile turned

into a grin, and Johnny found himself sniggering at the silliness of it all.

She rose and came around to the back of his chair. He felt her hands, gently from behind, on his shoulders. He breathed a sigh as her smooth, slim fingers slowly massaged his throat, tilting his head back until it rested in the soft cashmere of her sweater, between her breasts.

“Well, Mister Begoode,” she whispered quietly in his ear, “you haven’t fucked me yet.”

Hearing that word out of the mouth of a nun, a beautiful young nun, stirred an excitement Johnny had never felt before. He whirled his chair around and pulled her into his lap, his tongue probing deeply into her mouth, his hand slipping under her sweater where he found her ample left breast, unencumbered by a brassiere. He broke off the kiss, and while her lips went to his ear, he slid the sweater up to reveal the breast he had been ministering to. It was full and firm, with skin like translucent marble, and an aureole dark and perfectly formed and topped with a taut, protruding, berry-like nipple. This he immediately seized in his teeth, prompting a titillated squeal from the girl. Now Johnny sucked gently, the hard, cartilaginous protuberance pumping in and out of his mouth while her tongue swabbed his ear with wet kisses. She began to moan, and rising from his lap, she pulled off the sweater, the two marvelous melons of her breasts bouncing free. Now Johnny was up too, burrowing his face between her breasts, licking everywhere, his tongue swirling swaths of saliva from nipples to lips.

“Oh you bastard!” she cried in ecstasy, “suck my tits, lick my nipples. See how they stick out? How hard they are? Suck them, bite them, kiss them my little monk!” she babbled madly.

Johnny paid no attention to her talk, so caught up was he in the ravishing of the most magnificent body he had ever seen, and that included a lot of skin magazines. And in the

meantime her fingers had been feeling his prick through his pants and had rendered it as hard as a hammer.

Finally she pushed him off and began peeling down the skin-tight jeans. “Now you must fuck me, Johnny,” she commanded in quaking voice.

He stood transfixed; she wore nothing underneath and his eyes feasted on the softly-rounded belly punctuated by a deep, erotic navel; and travelling down his gaze rested on the ample patch of pubic hair hiding her sweet snatch.

“*Not here!*” hissed Johnny, in a flash of lucidity that proved fleeting.

“*Here!*” she insisted, and she turned and bent over the desk, thrusting her beauteous buttocks in the air, flattening her breasts against the top of the desk, looking back at him, supplicating him with those bewitching eyes. In a shake his pants and shorts were around his ankles. He paused for a moment, his stiff cock bobbing in the air while he malaxed those firm, soft globes, running wet trails down the middle of her back with his tongue. Finally he could resist no longer, and with her hand helping guide him, he penetrated her wet, throbbing pussy with a mighty push. After several strokes she grabbed the edge of the desk and her body quivered in climax.

“Oh, fuck me! Fuck me!” she cried, almost in hysterics. “But be careful – they’re nuns and priests out there in the corridor!”

Again her strange gibbering couldn’t penetrate Johnny’s passion; his excitement was such he withdrew after several more strokes, fearing an ejaculation.

“Don’t stop!” she hissed. “Don’t stop or I’ll scream!”

He lay panting on her neck, kissing and cooing, his lubricious cock slowly sliding back and forth between the slippery cheeks of her ass.

“I . . . I’m going to come!” he choked.

“DON’T COME IN MY CUNT!” she cried, and immediately Johnny cupped his hand over her mouth.

“Jesus Christ shut up!” he ordered in a harsh whisper. “Do you remember where we are?! There are . . .”

“. . . priests and nuns out there in the corridor,” she completed the sentence and punctuated it with a bizarre laugh.

Again came that troubling thought on the mental state of his partner, but again Johnny was far beyond the point of interrogating himself. Instead, feeling his orgasm waning away he once more began to move his juiced-up prick between her cheeks. She turned to catch his eye and gave him a lewd smile.

“Fuck me in the ass, Mister Begoode,” she whispered. “Do as I command! *I’m* the prioress here!”

Once again this obscene talk from a face of such angelic beauty drove him to heights of passion he’d never imagined, even in his most erotic dreams. For a moment he stood stupefied by the perfection of the form in front of him, from the delicate ankles curving up to full, faultless calves, slightly narrowing then to the sublime nubs of the knees, and then gently arching out again into the elegance of the comely thighs, and finishing in the majesty of the sculpturesque, tear-shaped, downy *derrière*. It was here that Johnny’s attention finally rested. It was time to worship at the shrine of the Madonna. He fell to his knees.

“OOOOOOooooooooohhhh,” she whispered with the first wet lick lavished in her glistening crack. “OOOOOOooooooooohhhh, yes!” she consented as the hot, hard tongue then attacked that pink-petaled flower of eroticism, scented and sweet and plump, throbbing in anticipation. “OOOOOOooooooooohhhh, *oui!*” she whimpered in ecstasy as the teasing glossal tool penetrated ever so slightly that secret sanctuary of sin.

Johnny came up for air and she turned to catch his eye, her look imploring him to continue. “OOOOooooohhhh, *Seigneur!*” she squealed as he ducked back down to continue his ministrations. “*Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi,*” she incanted, her knuckles turning white as she desperately gripped the edge of the dark desk. “*Ecce Agnus Dei,*” she babbled on. “Oh, yes, suck my ass Culraide you fucking bitch, just like Sister Josita, suck my sweet ass good and proper!”

Johnny paused again, breathing hard, resting his cheek against the back of her thigh. He slowly ran his finger up the other long, sublime leg, now trembling with her approaching orgasm, and gently slipped it into her tight anus. “OOOooooohhh,” she groaned and begged him again:

“Oh, please, Johnny, fuck me in the ass! I want to feel your big prick in my bottom! I want you to blow your load inside me!”

One more luscious pass between the cheeks, tonguing and sucking up the slather, and Johnny was to his feet. “And now to work, my beautiful little prioress,” he murmured, gripping one glorious globe low on the lobe, where it graciously curved out from her thigh.

He reverently spread the cheek with his thumb and presented his petrous prick to the puckered orifice. “Any port in a storm!” was the punchline from a childhood dirty joke that went through his mind as he carefully forced the opening. Now perspiration glistened on both bodies and Angelique let loose a long series of low grunts as Johnny slowly sheathed his flaming sword, ring by ring, through her sphincter, finally finishing totally impaled in the lovely creature’s beauty of beauties. After a moment’s pause, he began a slow to and fro that quickly brought her to a delirium of pleasure and passion. She lay with the side of her face down, her magnificent black mane spread across the desk, her eyes closed, spittle drooling from her lips, muttering in sodomic rhythm:

“Hail Mary full of Grace . . . Blessed and venerable Virgin Mary . . . without spot to your maidenhood . . . Mother of the Saviour who enclosed Himself in your womb reconciling in Himself the lowest with the highest . . . the rod of Jesse has blossomed . . . let the earth be opened and bud forth . . . lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up you ancient portals, that the King of glory may come in . . .”

And now the regular slap-slapping rhythm of his groin against her buttocks is broken as Johnny muffles a cry to herald the approaching climax, echoing the long, low, unbroken moan escaping Angelique’s lips. A series of violent orgasms has left her totally spent. She sprawls like a stringless marionette as Johnny continues to buck her behind, her chin now bumping on the desk with the force of each thrust. And here Johnny makes a final, mighty shove as every cell in his body screams out the climax of a lifetime, and the pent-up semen explodes in copious spurts, flooding the entrails of the nicely-fucked girl.

And in that monumental moment as Johnny empties his balls and his brains, in that incredible instant as his eyes begin to roll up into his head, in that searing second of sublime sex, he turns to glimpse the office door standing slightly ajar, and the frightful face of *Frère* Fierot peeking around the jamb.

Mary had not heard Johnny arrive home, and was startled when she walked into the living room and saw him dragging himself up the stairs. She followed him up to see him flop fully clothed on the bed. The trip to town was terminated.

Later she put a cup of hot tea on the nightstand, and sat next to him on the bed. This time there was no smell of smoke, only an intriguing hint of French perfume and hot sex. But when his eyelids fluttered open she greeted him with a smile. And a question:

“How about Chapter Six?” she asked.

“It’s finished,” said Johnny Begoode.