said, using one of our old foolish ritual phrases of despair. 'Look what I've done now. In my bare feet yet. Get me a broom.'

'Take your life, Maddy. Take it.'

'Yes I will,' Maddy said. 'Yes I will.'

'Go away, don't stay here.'

'Yes I will.'

Then she bent down and began picking up the pieces of broken pink glass. My children stood back looking at her with awe and she was laughing and saying, 'It's no loss to me. I've got a whole shelf full of glass bowls. I've got enough glass bowls to do me the rest of my life. Oh, don't stand there looking at me, go and get me a broom!' I went around the kitchen looking for a broom because I seemed to have forgotten where it was kept and she said, 'But why can't I, Helen? *Why can't I?*'

MORDECAI RICHLER

b. 1931

The Summer My Grandmother Was Supposed to Die

Dr Katzman discovered the gangrene on one of his monthly visits. 'She won't last a month,' he said.

He said the same the second month, the third and the fourth, and now she lay dying in the heat of the back bedroom.

'God in heaven,' my mother said, 'what's she holding on for?'

The summer my grandmother was supposed to die we did not chip in with the Greenbaums to take a cottage in the Laurentians. My grandmother, already bed-ridden for seven years, could not be moved again. The doctor came twice a week. The only thing was to stay in the city and wait for her to die or, as my mother said, pass away. It was a hot summer, her bedroom was just behind the kitchen, and when we sat down to eat we could smell her. The dressings on my grandmother's left leg had to be changed several times a day and, according to Dr Katzman, any day might be her last in this world. 'It's in the hands of the Almighty,' he said.

'It won't be long now,' my father said, 'and she'll be better off, if you know what I mean?'

A nurse came every day from the Royal Victorian Order. She arrived punctually at noon and at five to twelve I'd join the rest of the boys under the outside staircase to peek up her dress as she climbed to our second-storey flat. Miss Bailey favoured absolutely beguiling pink panties, edged with lace, and that was better than waiting under the stairs for Cousin Bessie, for instance, who wore enormous cotton bloomers, rain or shine.

I was sent out to play as often as possible, because my mother felt it was not good for me to see somebody dying. Usually, I would just roam the scorched streets. There was Duddy, Gas sometimes, Hershey, Stan, Arty and me.

'Before your grandmaw kicks off,' Duddy said, 'she's going to roll her eyes and gurgle. That's what they call the death-rattle.'

'Aw, you know everything. *Putz*.'

'I read it, you jerk,' Duddy said, whacking me one, 'in Perry Mason.'

Home again I would usually find my mother sour and spent. Sometimes she wept.

'She's dying by inches,' she said to my father one stifling night, 'and none of them ever come to see her. Oh, such children,' she added, going on to curse them vehemently in Yiddish.

'They're not behaving right. It's certainly not according to Hoyle,' my father said.

Dr Katzman continued to be astonished. 'It must be will-power alone that keeps her going,' he said. 'That, and your excellent care.'

'It's not my mother any more in the back room, Doctor. It's an animal. I want her to die.'

'Hush. You don't mean it. You're tired.' Dr Katzman dug into his black bag and produced pills for her to take. 'Your wife's a remarkable woman,' he told my father.

'You don't so say,' my father replied, embarrassed.

'A born nurse.'

My sister and I used to lie awake talking about our grandmother. 'After she dies,' I said, 'her hair will go on growing for another twenty-four hours.'

'Says who?'

'Duddy Kravitz. Do you think Uncle Lou will come from New York for the funeral?'

'I suppose so.'

'Boy, that means another fiver for me. Even more for you.'

'You shouldn't say things like that or her ghost will come back to haunt you.'

'Well, I'll be able to go to her funeral anyway. I'm not too young any more.'

I was only six years old when my grandfather died, and so I wasn't allowed to go to his funeral.

I have one imperishable memory of my grandfather. Once he called me into his study, set me down on his lap, and made a drawing of a horse for me. On the horse he drew a rider. While I watched and giggled he gave the rider a beard and the fur-trimmed round hat of a rabbi, a *straimel*, just like he wore.

My grandfather had been a Zaddik, one of the Righteous, and I've

been assured that to study Talmud with him had been an illuminating experience. I wasn't allowed to go to his funeral, but years later I was shown the telegrams of condolence that had come from Eire and Poland and even Japan. My grandfather had written many books: a translation of the Book of Splendour (the Zohar) into modern Hebrew, some twenty years work, and lots of slender volumes of sermons, hasidic tales, and rabbinical commentaries. His books had been published in Warsaw and later in New York.

'At the funeral,' my mother said, 'they had to have six motorcycle policemen to control the crowds. It was such a heat that twelve women fainted—and I'm *not* counting Mrs Waxman from upstairs. With her, you know, *anything* to fall into a man's arms. Even Pinsky's. And did I tell you that there was even a French Canadian priest there?'

'Aw, you're kidding me.'

'The priest was some *knacker*. A bishop maybe. He used to study with the *zeyda*. The *zeyda* was a real personality, you know. Spiritual and worldly-wise at the same time. Such personalities they don't make any more. Today rabbis and peanuts come in the same size.'

But, according to my father, the *zeyda* (his father-in-law) hadn't been as celebrated as all that. 'There are things I could say,' he told me. 'There was another side to him.'

My grandfather had sprung from generations and generations of rabbis, his youngest son was a rabbi, but none of his grandchildren would be one. My Cousin Jerry was already a militant socialist. I once heard him say, 'When the men at the kosher bakeries went out on strike the *zeyda* spoke up against them on the streets and in the *shuls*. It was of no consequence to him that the men were grossly underpaid. His superstitious followers had to have bread. Grandpappy,' Jerry said, 'was a prize reactionary.'

A week after my grandfather died my grandmother suffered a stroke. Her right side was completely paralysed. She couldn't speak. At first it's true, she could manage a coherent word or two and move her right hand enough to write her name in Hebrew. Her name was Malka. But her condition soon began to deteriorate.

My grandmother had six children and seven step-children, for my grandfather had been married before. His first wife had died in the old country. Two years later he had married my grandmother, the only daughter of the most affluent man in the *shtetl*, and their marriage had been a singularly happy one. My grandmother had been a beautiful girl. She had also been a shrewd, resourceful, and patient wife. Qualities, I fear, indispensable to life with a Zaddik. For the synagogue paid my

grandfather no stipulated salary and much of the money he picked up here and there he had habitually distributed among rabbinical students, needy immigrants and widows. A vice, for such it was to his impecunious family, which made him as unreliable a provider as a drinker. To carry the analogy further, my grandmother had to make hurried, surreptitious trips to the pawnbroker with her jewellery. Not all of it to be redeemed, either. But her children had been looked after. The youngest, her favourite, was a rabbi in Boston, the oldest was the actor-manager of a Yiddish theatre in New York, and another was a lawyer. One daughter lived in Montreal, two in Toronto. My mother was the youngest daughter and when my grandmother had her stroke there was a family conclave and it was decided that my mother would take care of her. This was my father's fault. All the other husbands spoke up—they protested hotly that their wives had too much work—they could never manage it—but my father detested quarrels and so he was silent. And my grandmother came to stay with us.

Her bedroom, the back bedroom, had actually been promised to me for my seventh birthday, but now I had to go on sharing a room with my sister. So naturally I was resentful when each morning before I left for school my mother insisted that I go in and kiss my grandmother goodbye.

'Bouyo-bouyo,' was the only sound my grandmother could make.

During those first hopeful months—'Twenty years ago who would have thought there'd be a cure for diabetes?' my father asked. 'Where there's life, you know.'—my grandmother would smile and try to speak, her eyes charged with effort; and I wondered if she knew that I was waiting for her room.

Even later there were times when she pressed my hand urgently to her bosom with her surprisingly strong left arm. But as her illness dragged on and on she became a condition in the house, something beyond hope or reproach, like the leaky ice-box, there was less recognition and more ritual in those kisses. I came to dread her room. A clutter of sticky medicine bottles and the cracked toilet chair beside the bed; glazed but imploring eyes and a feeble smile, the wet smack of her crooked lips against my cheeks. I flinched from her touch. And after two years, I protested to my mother, 'What's the use of telling her I'm going here or I'm going there? She doesn't even recognize me any more.'

'Don't be fresh. She's your grandmother.'

My uncle who was in the theatre in New York sent money regularly to help support my grandmother and, for the first few months, so did the other children. But once the initial and sustaining excitement had passed the children seldom came to our house any more. Anxious weekly visits—

'And how is she today, poor lamb?'—quickly dwindled to a dutiful monthly looking in, then a semi-annual visit, and these always on the way to somewhere.

When the children did come my mother was severe with them. 'I have to lift her on that chair three times a day maybe. And what makes you think I always catch her in time? Sometimes I have to change her linen twice a day. That's a job I'd like to see your wife do,' she said to my uncle, the rabbi.

'We could send her to the Old People's Home.'

'Now there's an idea,' my father said.

'Not so long as I'm alive.' My mother shot my father a scalding look, 'Say something, Sam.'

'Quarrelling will get us nowhere. It only creates bad feelings.'

Meanwhile, Dr Katzman came once a month. 'It's astonishing,' he would say each time. 'She's as strong as a horse.'

'Some life for a person,' my father said. 'She can't speak—she doesn't recognize anybody—what is there for her?'

The doctor was a cultivated man; he spoke often for women's clubs, sometimes on Yiddish literature and other times, his rubicund face hot with menace, the voice taking on a doomsday tone, on the cancer threat. 'Who are we to judge?' he asked.

Every evening, during the first few months of my grandmother's illness, my mother would read her a story by Sholem Aleichem. 'Tonight she smiled,' my mother would report defiantly. 'She understood. I can tell.'

Bright afternoons my mother would lift the old lady into a wheelchair and put her out in the sun and once a week she gave her a manicure. Somebody always had to stay in the house in case my grandmother called. Often, during the night, she would begin to wail unaccountably and my mother would get up and rock her mother in her arms for hours. But in the fourth year of my grandmother's illness the strain began to tell. Besides looking after my grandmother, my mother had to keep house for a husband and two children. She became scornful of my father and began to find fault with my sister and me. My father started to spend his evenings playing pinochle at Tansky's Cigar & Soda. Weekends he took me to visit his brothers and sisters. Wherever my father went people had little snippets of advice for him.

'Sam, you might as well be a bachelor. One of the other children should take the old lady for a while. You're just going to have to put your foot down for once.'

'Yeah, in your face, maybe.'

My Cousin Libby, who was at McGill, said, 'This could have a very damaging effect on the development of your children. These are their formative years, Uncle Samuel, and the omnipresence of death in the house . . .'

'What you need is a boy friend,' my father said. '*And how.*'

After supper my mother took to falling asleep in her chair, even in the middle of Lux Radio Theatre. One minute she would be sewing a patch in my breeches or making a list of girls to call for a bingo party, proceeds for the Talmud Torah, and the next she would be snoring. Then, inevitably, there came the morning she just couldn't get out of bed and Dr Katzman had to come round a week before his regular visit. 'Well, well, this won't do, will it?'

Dr Katzman led my father into the kitchen. 'Your wife's got a gallstone condition,' he said.

My grandmother's children met again, this time without my mother, and decided to put the old lady in the Jewish Old People's Home on Esplanade Street. While my mother slept an ambulance came to take my grandmother away.

'It's for the best,' Dr Katzman said, but my father was in the back room when my grandmother held on tenaciously to the bedpost, not wanting to be moved by the two men in white.

'Easy does it, granny,' the younger man said.

Afterwards my father did not go in to see my mother. He went out for a walk.

When my mother got out of bed two weeks later her cheeks had regained their normal pinkish hue; for the first time in months, she actually joked with me. She became increasingly curious about how I was doing in school and whether or not I shined my shoes regularly. She began to cook special dishes for my father again and resumed old friendships with the girls on the parochial school board. Not only did my father's temper improve, but he stopped going to Tansky's every night and began to come home early from work. But my grandmother's name was seldom mentioned. Until one evening, after I'd had a fight with my sister, I said, 'Why can't I move into the back bedroom now?'

My father glared at me. 'Big-mouth.'

'It's empty, isn't it?'

The next afternoon my mother put on her best dress and coat and new spring hat.

'Don't go looking for trouble,' my father said.

'It's been a month. Maybe they're not treating her right.'

'They're experts.'

'Did you think I was never going to visit her? I'm not inhuman, you know.'

'Alright, go.' But after she had gone my father stood by the window and said, 'I was born lucky, and that's it.'

I sat on the outside stoop watching the cars go by. My father waited on the balcony above, cracking peanuts. It was six o'clock, maybe later, when the ambulance slowed down and rocked to a stop right in front of our house. 'I knew it,' my father said. 'I was born with all the luck.'

My mother got out first, her eyes red and swollen, and hurried upstairs to make my grandmother's bed.

'You'll get sick again,' my father said.

'I'm sorry, Sam, but what could I do? From the moment she saw me she cried and cried. It was terrible.'

'They're recognized experts there. They know how to take care of her better than you do.'

'Experts? Expert murderers you mean. She's got bedsores, Sam. Those dirty little Irish nurses they don't change her linen often enough they hate her. She must have lost twenty pounds in there.'

'Another month and you'll be flat on your back again. I'll write you a guarantee, if you want.'

My father became a regular at Tansky's again and, once more, I had to go in and kiss my grandmother in the morning. Amazingly, she had begun to look like a man. Little hairs had sprouted on her chin, she had grown a spiky grey moustache, and she was practically bald.

Yet again my uncles and aunts sent five dollar bills, though erratically, to help pay for my grandmother's support. Elderly people, former followers of my grandfather, came to inquire about the old lady's health. They sat in the back bedroom with her, leaning on their canes, talking to themselves and rocking to and fro. 'The Holy Shakers,' my father called them. I avoided the seamed, shrunken old men because they always wanted to pinch my cheeks or trick me with a dash of snuff and laugh when I sneezed. When the visit with my grandmother was over the old people would unfailingly sit in the kitchen with my mother for another hour, watching her make *lokshen*, slurping lemon tea out of a saucer. They would recall the sayings and books and charitable deeds of the late Zaddik.

'At the funeral,' my mother never wearied of telling them, 'they had to have six motorcycle policemen to control the crowds.'

In the next two years there was no significant change in my grandmother's condition, though fatigue, ill-temper, and even morbidity enveloped my mother again. She fought with her brothers and sisters and

once, after a particularly bitter quarrel, I found her sitting with her head in her hands. 'If, God forbid, I had a stroke,' she said, 'would you send me to the Old People's Home?'

'Of course not.'

'I hope that never in my life do I have to count on my children for anything.'

The seventh summer of my grandmother's illness she was supposed to die and we did not know from day to day when it would happen. I was often sent out to eat at an aunt's or at my other grandmother's house. I was hardly ever at home. In those days they let boys into the left-field bleachers of Delormier Downs free during the week and Duddy, Gas sometimes, Hershey, Stan, Arty and me spent many an afternoon at the ball park. The Montreal Royals, kingpin of the Dodger farm system, had a marvellous club at the time. There was Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, Lou Ortiz, Red Durrett, Honest John Gabbard, and Kermit Kitman. Kitman was our hero. It used to give us a charge to watch that crafty little Jew, one of ours, running around out there with all those tall dumb southern crackers. 'Hey, Kitman,' we would yell, 'Hey, shmo-head, if your father knew you played ball on *shabus*—' Kitman, alas, was all field and no hit. He never made the majors. 'There goes Kermit Kitman,' we would holler, after he had gone down swinging again, 'the first Jewish strike-out king of the International League.' This we promptly followed up by bellowing choice imprecations in Yiddish.

It was after one of these games, on a Friday afternoon, that I came home to find a crowd gathered in front of our house.

'That's the grandson,' somebody said.

A knot of old people stood staring at our front door from across the street. A taxi pulled up and my aunt hurried out, hiding her face in her hands.

'After so many years,' a woman said.

'And probably next year they'll discover a cure. Isn't that always the case?'

The flat was clotted. Uncles and aunts from my father's side of the family, strangers, Dr Katzman, neighbours, were all milling around and talking in hushed voices. My father was in the kitchen, getting out the apricot brandy. 'Your grandmother's dead,' he said.

'Where's Maw?'

'In the bedroom with . . . You'd better not go in.'

'I want to see her.'

My mother wore a black shawl and glared down at a knot of handkerchief

clutched in a fist that had been cracked by washing soda. 'Don't come in here,' she said.

Several bearded round-shouldered men in shiny black coats surrounded the bed. I couldn't see my grandmother.

'Your grandmother's dead.'

'Daddy told me.'

'Go wash your face and comb your hair.'

'Yes.'

'You'll have to get your own supper.'

'Sure.'

'One minute. The *baba* left some jewellery. The necklace is for Rifka and the ring is for your wife.'

'Who's getting married?'

'Better go and wash your face. Remember behind the ears, please.'

Telegrams were sent, the obligatory long distance calls were made, and all through the evening relatives and neighbours and old followers of the Zaddik poured into the house. Finally, the man from the funeral parlour arrived.

'There goes the only Jewish businessman in town,' Segal said, 'who wishes all his customers were German.'

'This is no time for jokes.'

'Listen, life goes on.'

My Cousin Jerry had begun to affect a cigarette holder. 'Soon the religious mumbo-jumbo starts,' he said to me.

'Wha'?'

'Everybody is going to be sickeningly sentimental.'

The next day was the sabbath and so, according to law, my grandmother couldn't be buried until Sunday. She would have to lie on the floor all night. Two grizzly women in white came to move and wash the body and a professional mourner arrived to sit up and pray for her. 'I don't trust his face,' my mother said. 'He'll fall asleep.'

'He won't fall asleep.'

'You watch him, Sam.'

'A fat lot of good prayers will do her now. Alright! Okay! I'll watch him.'

My father was in a fury with Segal.

'The way he goes after the apricot brandy you'd think he never saw a bottle in his life before.'

Rifka and I were sent to bed, but we couldn't sleep. My aunt was sobbing over the body in the living room; there was the old man praying, coughing and spitting into his handkerchief whenever he woke; and the

hushed voices and whimpering from the kitchen, where my father and mother sat. Rifka allowed me a few drags off her cigarette.

'Well, *pisherke*, this is our last night together. Tomorrow you can take over the back room.'

'Are you crazy?'

'You always wanted it for yourself, didn't you?'

'She died in there, but.'

'So?'

'I couldn't sleep in there now.'

'Good night and happy dreams.'

'Hey, let's talk some more.'

'Did you know,' Rifka said, 'that when they hang a man the last thing that happens is that he has an orgasm?'

'A wha'?'

'Skip it. I forgot you were still in kindergarten.'

'Kiss my Royal Canadian—'

'At the funeral, they're going to open the coffin and throw dirt in her face. It's supposed to be earth from Eretz. They open it and you're going to have to look.'

'Says you.'

A little while after the lights had been turned out Rifka approached my bed, her head covered with a sheet and her arms raised high. 'Bouyo-bouyo. Who's that sleeping in my bed? Woo-woo.'

My uncle who was in the theatre and my aunt from Toronto came to the funeral. My uncle, the rabbi, was there too.

'As long as she was alive,' my mother said, 'he couldn't even send her five dollars a month. I don't want him in the house, Sam. I can't bear the sight of him.'

'You're upset,' Dr Katzman said, 'and you don't know what you're saying.'

'Maybe you'd better give her a sedative,' the rabbi said.

'Sam will you speak up for once, please.'

Flushed, eyes heated, my father stepped up to the rabbi. 'I'll tell you this straight to your face, Israel,' he said. 'You've gone down in my estimation.'

The rabbi smiled a little.

'Year by year,' my father continued, his face burning a brighter red, 'your stock has gone down with me.'

My mother began to weep and she was led unwillingly to a bed. While my father tried his utmost to comfort her, as he muttered consoling things, Dr Katzman plunged a needle into her arm. 'There we are,' he said.

I went to sit on the stoop outside with Duddy. My uncle, the rabbi, and Dr Katzman stepped into the sun to light cigarettes.

'I know exactly how you feel,' Dr Katzman said. 'There's been a death in the family and the world seems indifferent to your loss. Your heart is broken and yet it's a splendid summer day . . . a day made for love and laughter . . . and that must seem very cruel to you.'

The rabbi nodded; he sighed.

'Actually,' Dr Katzman said, 'it's remarkable that she held out for so long.'

'Remarkable?' the rabbi said. 'It's written that if a man has been married twice he will spend as much time with his first wife in heaven as he did on earth. My father, may he rest in peace, was married to his first wife for seven years and my mother, may she rest in peace, has managed to keep alive for seven years. Today in heaven she will be able to join my father, may he rest in peace.'

Dr Katzman shook his head. 'It's amazing,' he said. He told my uncle that he was writing a book based on his experiences as a healer. 'The mysteries of the human heart.'

'Yes.'

'Astonishing.'

My father hurried outside. 'Dr Katzman, please. It's my wife. Maybe the injection wasn't strong enough. She just doesn't stop crying. It's like a tap. Can you come in, please?'

'Excuse me,' Dr Katzman said to my uncle.

'Of course.' My uncle turned to Duddy and me. 'Well, boys,' he said, 'what would you like to be when you grow up?'

Matt Cohen

MATT COHEN was born in Kingston, Ontario, in 1942, but lived in Ottawa until 1960, when he entered the University of Toronto. After graduating he spent some time in Europe, where he began a novel that was accepted by an English publisher. In 1963, however, Cohen withdrew (and later burned) the novel and returned to Canada to attend graduate school. In 1969, after the publication of *Karsoniloff*, he moved to a farm north of Kingston and began his next novel, *Johnny Crackle Sings* (1971). Since then he has written four connected novels—*The Disinherited* (1974), *The Colours of War* (1977), *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone* (1979), and *Flowers of Darkness* (1981)—and two books of short stories—*Columbus and the Fat Lady* (1972) and *Night Flights* (1978). George Woodcock has called him 'one of the most interesting and versatile among the younger generation of novelists.' His collected stories, *The Expatriate*, has been published by General Publishing, and he is presently at work on a new volume of stories, to be called *The Last Days of the Empire*, and a long novel set in fourteenth-century Spain, the working title of which is *The Jewish Doctor*.

'The Expatriate' is not unlike Margaret Atwood's story, 'The Man from Mars,' in that its main character is forced by circumstances to confront an immigrant's loneliness and isolation, and must then come to terms with his own lack of identity, his absence of *place*.

THE EXPATRIATE

ALEC CONSTANTINE still possessed, as Annie had often remarked, the same baby face he had been born with: a round fair face with blue eyes, a generous mouth, sandy hair that he always parted on the left. He was twenty-eight years old and since he had left university a few years ago he had been unemployed in a variety of ways. Currently he was an unemployed writer of films. Before that he had been an unemployed taxi driver, a status that he preferred. 'Why can't I be an unemployed cabbie again?' he asked himself as he reached into the freezer and put two ice cubes into his glass. Then he added scotch until the glass was half-full. He always started with the ice and then added the scotch. This glass was the last of the set he'd had when he lived with Annie. When it was gone, he wouldn't know how to measure his drinks. 'I miss her in the little ways,' he said to himself. And then, 'I don't know if it was fate or just bad luck.'

It was the summer of 1978, the year the Toronto Blue Jays bought their way into major league baseball. Alec was living on the second floor of an old Victorian house, above a store that specialized in milk, white bread, and West Indian spices. He liked the smells of the spices filtering up through his floor, but the store was in the wrong district and it had hardly any customers. When he had first moved into the apartment he would often go into the store, near suppertime, and walk up and down the aisles in search of something to eat. But the mysteries of West Indian food escaped him and eventually, too embarrassed to ask for help, he went back to shopping at the supermarket.

Earlier that afternoon Barney Devine, a sports reporter for the Toronto *Sun*, had telephoned and asked if he wanted to go to the baseball game.

'No way,' Alec had replied.

'What else have you got to do?'

'I'm not going to watch the Blue Jays lose another game,' Alec said. 'They are the worst team in the history of the National League.'

'You don't know anything,' said Barney. 'They're not even in the National League. They're in the American League.'

'All right. They're the worst team in the history of the American League.'

'Not yet,' Barney said, 'the season isn't over yet.'

'You guys just write about baseball because secretly you want to be American reporters. Why don't you write about lacrosse?'

'For Christ's sake,' Barney said, 'you really have it bad.'

Now Alec found himself turning on the radio. Barney would be happy to know he was repenting. It was the top of the second inning and the Yankees were already beating the Blue Jays 9-1. 'Is it fate or just bad luck?' All day the line had been running through his mind, but he couldn't remember which record it had come from.

Leaving the radio on, he walked from the kitchen back to the living room and sat down, with his scotch, in an armchair with a pine table beside it. The pine table too was a remnant of his time with Annie, and putting his glass down on a coaster he was once more reminded of her. During their first two months apart thinking about her made him want to cry; now it seemed to make him recite clichés.

'I miss her,' he said aloud to himself, 'I want her so desperately that I have to drink scotch instead of beer. It's come to that.' His voice was drowned out by the clanking of a passing streetcar.

It's come to that. These words had leapt inanely into his mouth when she had told him, during one of their penultimate scenes, that she was having an affair with one of the actors in the film.

'So it's come to that,' he had said, amazed at the sound of these particular words rolling forth. What he had meant, though he never explained it, was that in her need to hurt him she had settled for a supporting actor.

'That's right.' Those days she had an amazingly abrasive voice, and she liked to put her hands on her hips when a fight was starting. She had been wearing her denim skirt and a red sleeveless top. Instead of shouting he wanted to kiss her tanned shoulders.

Remembering Annie's shoulders, the salty taste of her skin, he had gotten himself hunched over in the chair, his head lolling forward like that of an old man. 'Really,' he said to himself, 'I really am getting strange,' and he swung out of his chair and walked to the bathroom to rinse his hands and face. Not only were the Blue Jays the worst team in the history of the world, but the summer heat was choking.

'It's nerves,' he said to himself, 'it's my nerves.' He looked critically in the mirror. His baby face was still there, but since Annie had left, little maps of defeat had started to inscribe themselves around his eyes. Now he imagined that these maps were going to tell the story of his journey from true and happy youth into the kingdom of experience. He left the bathroom and walked to the living room where his typewriter was waiting. 'I know,' he muttered, 'you can't go home again.'

He sat down at his desk. From outside the window came the constant rush of traffic, and usually his concentration was so poor that at the end of an hour at the desk he knew how many streetcars had passed. The truth was, as his friend Barney had insisted on pointing out, the truth was that he wasn't even truly unemployed. In fact, he had been commissioned to write an educational film on the good fortune of immigrants to Canada.

'That's not a film.' Alec had protested, 'that's government propaganda.'

'Look at Leni Riefenstahl.' Barney said. '*Triumph of the Will.*'

'For God's sake,' Alec spluttered, 'she worked for Hitler.'

'That's what I mean.' Barney said smugly. 'Art comes from strange places.'

Strange places. Alec thought. In front of him was the outline for his film, *The Expatriate.* It was to be a modestly affecting masterpiece about an immigrant who came from a strange place before he arrived in his new country, Canada.

Seasons are torn from the unwilling body of the expatriate. Slowly the home country grows in the mind. Reborn in nostalgia, it improves upon itself and bright, fabulous creatures glide through cities of light. Tall forests breathe to the sound of ocean waves breaking on endless beaches.

Even his own remembered flesh glows with immortality; the day of his leaving has become the watershed that separates youth from middle age, and in his dreams the streets are now empty of loud traffic and police. Such is the power of memory that even the dogshit had disappeared.

In his home country he worked in his father's grocery store by day, scribbled novels by night. His father had a friend who printed the district newspaper; as a favour he published one of the night-

written novels. Two thousand copies were bound with soft paper covers. For a while they were displayed, very discreetly, in the corners of bookstore windows. At night, after the stores were closed, he would tour the city to see if the books had been bought. Gradually they went out of the windows, but when he became brave enough to enter a store he found that the books had simply been moved to the shelves, and from there, finally, as the beige covers grew bitter and dark, they went to the sale tables.

There had been one review:

> *A precious new talent has appeared with the publication of* Fires in My Heart. *The stories entertain with anecdotes of parents who must seem, in retrospect, somewhat ludicrous. The author has a poet's feel for insects and grass, but we must await further books, as this reviewer sincerely does, to see if he can do the same for people.*

After starting his outline, Alec went to meet Barney in their usual restaurant, a dim Hungarian place that specialized in cooking with poppy seeds. As always it was filled with would-be artists, perpetual students, men and women unemployed at a dazzling variety of jobs.

'I'll have the salad,' Alec said.

'The big one or the little one?'

'The one dollar and eighty-five cent salad,' Alec said.

'That's the big one.'

'I haven't eaten for a week.'

'You haven't?'

Alec looked up at the waitress. She had dark wavy hair, brushed straight back, and black eyes that were open wide, looking into his. She traced a circle with her hands, outlining the size of the salad. Her fingers made him feel hungry.

'I haven't.'

The waitress laughed. And then she slipped one of her hands under his arm and squeezed his ribs. 'You've got lots of meat,' she said.

She left the table and Barney rapped the arborite surface. 'You see? Women are still attracted to you.'

'Thanks.'

'Why don't you pick her up?'

'Did you see how young she was?'

'How old are you?'

After paying at the cash Alec went back to leave a tip. The waitress was taking away the dishes.

'You really think I'm too fat?'

She stopped and turned toward him; her dark eyes looked into his. Alec caught the look without blinking.

'Look,' Alec said. 'I'll take you for a drink after work, OK?'

She lifted her hand, and he saw she was wearing a wedding ring. He was already starting to apologize when she cut him off.

'Ten o'clock,' she said.

Her name was Margaret, and after the first week she moved into his apartment, bringing a suitcase and a cello. When she was off duty she would sit in the living room and alternate exotic dances with long, grave sonatas while Alec attempted to rewrite the treatment for his script.

'She's a cellist,' he told Barney.

'That's nice,' Barney said. 'That's class.'

'Everyone in this town is an artist. You can't even pick up a waitress without her dreaming of Massey Hall.'

'Carnegie Hall,' Barney corrected. 'Can't you even see beyond your own nose?'

When she woke up, Margaret had a quick breakfast of yoghurt mixed with dried fruit and nuts and then, fortified with a strong cup of coffee, she went into the living room to practise. 'Arpegios and scales,' she said to Alec, and the words reminded him of his own humble insects and grass. 'arpeggios and scales are an absolute *must* for players of strings.'

Lying in bed, Alec would listen to the brilliant runs, long, dense climbs from the deepest bass notes to its treble utmost, a high contralto singing that put in mind his poor expatriate who, in the film, would exult in his good fortune at being allowed to live in Canada.

As Alec got dressed and wandered into the kitchen, he would listen for the rustle of Margaret changing the music on her stand. And then, taking for granted the patience of the spice store below, Margaret would begin on her new and favourite project, her beloved Vivaldi concertos for violin which she herself had transcribed for the cello.

Into the ecstatic rendering of these concertos she would be totally launched by the time Alec had eaten his own breakfast of toast and jam and seated himself at the typewriter.

'I'm doing the script as the story of one man,' Alec explained to his producer, 'one man who has come to Canada as a refugee and is making his own adjustment to a new life.'

'No politics,' the producer warned. The producer had an arching nose with a red welt over the bridge, and he always wore safari-style clothes. The welt on his nose was caused by steel-rimmed mirror sunglasses.

'No politics,' Alec agreed. 'Just the warm and compassionate story of one human being set adrift in seas of change only to put down roots in a new and foreign land.'

'Got you,' said the producer. He lit a plastic-tipped cigar and waved Alec out of the office.

The expatriate was living in the house of his mother's cousin, and the room he shared with the cousin's six-year-old boy was small and covered in violently yellow wallpaper. He spent his afternoons and evenings walking the streets, trying to accustom himself to hearing and speaking this new nasal version of English.

Sometimes at night, unable to sleep in the heat, he would sit up late and fashion dolls out of bits of cloth. While his father sold groceries, his mother had kept her hands busy sewing dolls. Usually they were given as Christmas presents, but once a hated neighbour broke his back after a rag effigy accidently fell from the window into the courtyard.

A few weeks after arriving in Canada he saw an advertisement in the paper for a helper in cement work and the next morning, at six o'clock, he was standing with his soft grocer's hands on a wheelbarrow, waiting for the heavy clunk of cement dropping down from the mixer. When the barrow was full he wheeled it up a wooden ramp and dumped the contents into a form.

Every night he fell into bed. One evening he woke up to find the eyes of his cousin's son on his face.

His hand snaked out and he grabbed the boy's shirt. 'What're you doing?'

'Nothing.'

The expatriate sat up. The overhead light made the wallpaper look more bilious than ever. The boy's face was twisted in terror.

'I'm sorry.' He let go of the boy's shirt and lifted him up onto the bed. 'I was having a bad dream. You ever have bad dreams?'

The boy was crying.

He took the boy in his arms and rocked him back and forth. Every motion hurt his back. He should have a firm mattress, a room of his own.

'Soon I'm going to have a big house,' he told the boy, 'a big house with a swimming pool in the backyard. You want to come and live with me there?'

The boy, still crying, only nodded. Soon he pulled away and left the room.

At night Alec began to dream of his immigrant. Not so long ago he had dreamed not of immigrants but of wars. Planes screaming over unprotected shacks, jelly sticking to the skin and bursting into flame.

'It's the creative mind,' Barney said. 'You thought you were just a hack writer and a cab driver, but you really have something. Isn't that right, Margaret? Alec's the kind of guy who's always putting himself down.'

'It's supposed to be an optimistic story,' Alec said. 'We live in a land of opportunity.'

'Release your mind,' Barney said. 'Trust the artist in yourself.'

Margaret was sitting on a couch in the corner of the room. The late afternoon light came in the dusty window, lingered on her tanned neck, carried the white flash of her teeth as she smiled into the shadows.

'That's right,' Margaret said. 'Alec underestimates himself.'

She said this while her strong fingers tore apart the skin of an orange. These days Alec seldom thought of Annie; when he did he was grateful for the wound of their separation, because through that wound Margaret had entered his life.

That night Alec dreamed Barney had the immigrant's face, Barney with twisted foreign features. In the dream Barney was dressed up in a black suit, looking like Alec's father in the wedding photograph. Barney in his suit was working the cement mixer, wheeling loads of cement into the house Alec now recognized to be his own, wheeling in the cement and then pouring it onto the shining hardwood floor that his mother used to spend long mornings waxing.

'Barney Devine told me you could write,' the producer shouted angrily. 'What's this supposed to be? You trying to win a contest?' The room was thick with the smoke of plastic-tipped cigars. The producer was wearing a Leica around his neck and was sitting behind a leather-topped metal desk. Alec, on the other side, was squirming in an uncomfortable plastic chair. He looked past the producer's mirror sunglasses to the grey Toronto skyline. It was August already, but the days were sultry and dark, a strange mid-summer reminder that behind the heat, the winter was waiting. At least, Alec thought, the Blue Jays will be praying for snow. They were mired so deep in last place that for compassion's sake he had stopped teasing Barney.

'Listen,' the producer read with heavy sarcasm: '*The sweat on his hooked nose gleamed like a sword in the darkness. To the sound of the boy's footsteps retreating down the stairs, the immigrant tied his belt around his neck, then stood on a chair, trying to see if he had enough length to tie himself to the chandelier.*'

'It's a bit wordy,' Alec admitted. 'It's only a first draft.'

'Wordy,' the producer shouted. 'Who wants an education about someone who hangs himself? You want to give little children nightmares?'

'He shouldn't be a writer,' Alec said quickly. 'That was just a joke.'

'"Give him a chance," Barney said to me. "He really needs the work, otherwise he'll be driving a cab."' Now the producer took the Leica from his chest and aimed it at Alec. 'Smile,' he said.

Alec was on his feet, heading out the door.

'Give it another try,' the producer called after him, 'but try to go easy on the grease. *And the dogshit.*'

'He fired me,' Alec reported.

'No,' Barney intoned patiently, 'he didn't fire you. He asked you to rewrite your outline.'

'You said I should trust myself.'

'If you really trusted yourself,' Barney said, 'you wouldn't be so morbid.' It was the seventh-inning stretch, late afternoon on a late day in August. The weather had finally turned: a cooling breeze was coming in from the lake, and the sky above Exhibition Stadium was a deep and pleasant blue. The Jays had lost the first game of the doubleheader 12-4, and now they were trailing 4-1 in the second.

'He shouted at me,' Alec said. 'I don't take that kind of shit.' Even as he said it he held out his paper cup for Barney to replenish with scotch. The last glass at home had broken weeks ago: Margaret had dropped it on the kitchen floor during one of her infrequent but demonic cleanups. Alec had rushed from the living room to the kitchen door.

'I'm sorry,' Margaret had said.

Alec was unable to speak. Annie would not have apologized. Fate had blessed him by substituting Margaret, a sane and gentle person who cared for him, who asked no questions while carefully sweeping the last pitiful fragments of Annie into the yellow plastic dustpan.

'There was only one of them,' Margaret said.

'It doesn't matter, really. I used it for measuring my drinks.'

'I'll buy you a shot glass.'

That was the night he had phoned Barney and said he would like to go to a baseball game soon. Try something different, he had said; and in the middle of thinking it was the first time he had used this particular cliché in weeks, he noticed that he was alluding to himself as if he had some wilting disease. And as Barney's solicitous tone came back over the line, he realized that in fact Barney and Margaret both did see him as a pale and undernourished plant, one that had been traumatically spilled out of its pot and now needed extra love and water.

'I'm going for a walk,' he said to Margaret, after putting down the receiver.

'Sure.' Anything was permitted the invalid.

Alec slammed the door, knowing even as it banged shut that Margaret would forgive this new tantrum. Stepping toward the street he collided with a man who was leaving the grocery store. There was a brief and uncomfortable silence, during which Alec considered the feeling of the stranger's elbow in his ribs. Crooked into his arm was a bag of groceries. His eyes were streaked with red and his face was narrow and intense, the skin pocked along the high cheekbones and the sharp forehead.

'Excuse me,' Alec finally said.

The man turned his head, spat a long, yellow whip onto the sidewalk, and looked back at Alec. Alec, who was wearing a checked cotton shirt freshly ironed during his unemployed morning, looked down at the bony shoulders of the black man. He was wearing a singlet stained with dust and tar.

'Excuse me,' Alec said again and, his way to the sidewalk blocked, turned into the store.

Inside, the lights were yellow and warm. The owner, a heavy-set Jamaican who often waved to Alec from the front window, was sitting on a stool behind the counter, reading the newspaper to his daughter, who was perched beside him.

'Hey, what'll it be tonight?' He had a friendly smile, his mouth a wide curve.

'Cigarettes,' Alec said. 'A small Player's Filter.'

The hand reached up to the shelf, selected the package, came down, and extended the cigarettes to Alec.

Alec, who didn't smoke, took the cigarettes and then realized he had left his wallet upstairs.

'I forgot my money,' he said, putting the package on the glass counter. 'I'll be right down with it.'

The hand, palm whitened like a policeman's glove, waved in the air. 'Pay me tomorrow.'

'I don't mind,' Alec said. He stood, hesitating. Then, nodding at the little girl who had been staring at him the whole time, he took the cigarettes from the counter, dropped them on the floor, picked them up again, and put them in his back pocket, where his wallet should have been, and went out into the street.

The labourer was still there, leaning against a lamp post and looking at the entrance way. Alec saw the contempt carved into the rigid black face.

'Fuck you,' Alec said. The words coughed out of him, hardly audible.

The bare shoulders shrugged, muscles and bones defined like a heap of old stones. The fist came up, tapped twice on the metal post. Then the black turned, and the skinny stranger in the singlet began to walk down the street. He was carrying his brown bag of groceries and he was just turning the corner when Alec recognized him as the expatriate he had been dreaming.

At the bottom of the seventh inning Dave Mackay, the second baseman who couldn't hit, led off with a double.

'Look at him,' Alec said, 'he's a Canadian.'

Next up was Bob Bailor, a rookie from the mid-West with a soft southern accent. He lofted the first pitch deep into the right-field stands.

'They're going to win.' Barney said. This in a confident doctor's voice, as though the outcome had never been in doubt. He started jotting notes on the spiral pad he always carried, using the shorthand that he had spent a whole summer learning. Alec, watching his friend scribble words that he couldn't decipher, began to feel guilty about his betrayal of Barney's trust, his script that he couldn't finish.

Two more Jays got on base: the first by waiting out for balls, the second by letting his arm get in the way of an inside strike.

'This is it.' Barney said. Coming to the plate was the Jay's big hitter, Rico Carty. Playing on a cellar-dwelling team through a string of losses that would have discouraged even a revivalist, Carty had somehow managed to keep his average above .300. Now, leaning over the plate, he waggled his fleshy hips at the pitcher. The catcher suddenly straightened up, walked out to the mound. Carty turned to the crowd and grinned.

The catcher turned and crouched in position, his big round mitt like a sun filling up the sky. Carty ignored it, stepped out of the box to rap his bat against his shoes. Then, grinning again, he stretched his whole body like a big old tomcat trying to shake off a hangover. There was scattered laughter from the stands.

'Go get 'em, Rico,' one voice called.

'Go on, big man,' shouted another. Carty's black face gleamed. The stands heated up with more cries of encouragement. One section began to clap in rhythm. There were two men on base, the tying and winning runs. Carty at the plate pointed to centre field as if, like Babe Ruth, he was going to start directing them out of the park at will. He cocked the fat tip of the bat above his shoulders, rotated it in a slow and pregnant circle.

The pitcher whirled and threw to first base.

'We should have brought Margaret,' Alec said.

Barney just nodded, his pen racing.

Finally the ball came toward Carty, a fastball smoking down the alley. Carty swung, his broad shoulders snapping around like a flag. Alec was suddenly aware of the silence that had formed around the field, the thousands of sun-warmed bodies leaning forward into the evening, finally getting what they had come for. The bat cracked into the ball, splintering apart in Carty's big hands, and behind the sharp sound was a single grunt from Carty as the pain from the bat's breaking spread from his hands to his elbows. And with that

strange echo the ball reversed itself, a line drive making straight for the pitcher's face. Instinct saved him and as he fell back, surely unable to see the ball, his glove flew up, making the catch. Then habit took over and the ball was flipped back, behind him. The second baseman, with miraculous anticipation, was on the bag; casually his glove swallowed up the ball, and then in a routine move as familiar to him as his own mind, he relayed it to first. The two Jay runners were left standing in the middle of the base paths, shaking their heads at their own stupidity.

'A triple play,' Alec shouted. He pounded Barney on the back. 'I've never seen a triple play.'

'All right,' Barney sighed. 'The game isn't over yet.'

'All right,' said the producer. 'You tell me if I got it right.' Alec was in the producer's office again, but since their last meeting the producer had brought in a new guest chair. This one was the opposite of the old, uncomfortable plastic: it was a stuffed Salvation Army special, covered in red corduroy that had lost all of the ribbing on its back and arms, and whose seat was so worn with the exhausted buttocks of generations of Torontonians that when Alec lowered himself into it the producer's mirror sunglasses hovered above him like surrealistic moons. Alec wondered if this new chair meant that the producer was prospering or merely growing more sadistic.

'OK,' the producer continued, 'now tell me if I got the story? Some guy comes from the Caribbean, he's not a writer anymore, but his father was a grocer and the store burned down because he held an election rally there. Is that it so far?'

'That's it,' Alec said. If the producer bought the final, revised outline, there would be two thousand dollars to work on the first draft.

'OK,' said the producer. He was wearing a new and deeply green safari shirt with leather-covered buttons that looked like bark. After a brief struggle he extracted a package of his special cigars from one of the pockets. 'Now we're talking. I mean, you got this guy whose father's store is burned down because he wants to exercise his basic democratic rights, right?'

'Right.'

'Don't interrupt. Now, let me see, I had a question for you. To be basic, since it's the father who wants to hold the meeting, and the father who loses the store for his basic democratic et cetera, why don't you have the father come to Canada and be the hero of the movie? Who cares about the son?'

'Be flexible,' Barney had advised. 'You're in a meeting with this guy and he's going to say things that annoy you. Don't lose your temper, it's his money.'

'It's not really his money,' Alec protested.

'He thinks it's his money. And he's the one who signs the cheque. Just agree with everything he says and then change it all back when you get home.'

Alec looked out the producer's window. The view was a low-rise apartment building with a flat roof on which people were spread out in deck chairs, drinking beer. They were soaking up the sun, but he had the sun shining uncomfortably in his eyes.

'Good point,' Alec said. 'I never thought about having the father be the hero.'

'It's your first script,' allowed the producer, pleased. He rolled up the sleeves of his new shirt.

'But wouldn't he be a bit old?'

'How old is old?'

Alec closed his eyes, wishing he had closed his mouth first.

'Look,' Barney had said, 'if you go to your bank manager to get a loan, do you have a fight with him? Well, don't have a fight with this guy.'

'Good point,' said Alec to the producer. 'I should have thought that one through.'

'My grandfather came to this country when he was sixty-two years old. An old man? I'll tell you what my grandfather did. Every day, speaking not one word of English, mind you, he went down to the market and bought fish.'

'Brain food,' Alec said.

'Look, Barney told me you had something on the ball. What are you, some kind of Mongolian idiot?'

Alec didn't answer.

'He bought the fish and then he walked with it, carrying it in cardboard boxes—now you remember he was a man of sixty-two—and went from door to door selling it. Now, smart guy, you tell me why your immigrant couldn't do something like that? Don't you think there's a lesson in that for young children?'

'You're absolutely right,' Alec said.

'I was a young child,' the producer said. He was leaning across the desk. His voice was slowly escalating. 'You know what I learned?'

'No.'

'Can you imagine it? My own grandfather, going from door to door, selling fish from the market. Is that your grandfather, my friends used to ask me. How come he carries his fish in a box? *How come he carries his fish in a box?* Jesus Christ, Constantine, that was my grandfather and I was supposed to be treasurer of the Red Cross Society. You know what I learned from that old man?' The producer took off his mirrored sunglasses and looked intently at Alec. His eyes were pouched from drinking and didn't seem to be focused on exactly the same spot. 'Well, Mr Constantine the screenwriter, Mr Smart Alec, the chronicler of dogshit, what did I learn?'

'I don't know.'

The producer sighed and laid his hands helplessly on the desk. 'You don't know,' he whispered. He inspected his hands long and dolefully. Finally choosing the index finger of his right hand, he poked it up into the air, as if jabbing a soft and vulnerable spot.

'Roots,' the producer said. 'Roots.' He hissed the word, spitting out the last *s*. 'It's such a style now, isn't it, Mr Smart Alec?'

'He was big in New York,' Barney had told him. 'He has a right to his opinions.'

'I learned something about my roots from that old man,' the producer said. 'You know what I learned?' His voice was rising again. 'I learned to *hate* the bastard. I *hated* him going from door to door. I *hated* him and his stinky boxes of fish. Boxes of dead fish, for Christ's sake. I *hated* the way his breath smelled and I hated the way he left his false teeth in the bathroom. Look—'

Alec looked. The producer was leaning forward over his leather-topped desk, his elbows on Alec's scattered script, his forefinger crooked and pointing to his own perfectly white and even teeth.

'What do you see?'

'He gets carried away,' Barney had warned. 'He wanted to be in the big time, in Hollywood, but he ended up making B-westerns at dude ranches.'

'Teeth?'

'FALSE TEETH,' the producer shouted. 'Dentures, for Christ's sake, choppers. And I'm very proud of them, you know that? They're the best choppers in New York and I paid three thousand dollars. But you know what? You know what? I would never—God strike me down if I'm lying—I would never leave them in the bathroom. And you know what else my grandfather used to do? He used to take them out in the goddamn kitchen *so he could eat cottage cheese*.'

Alec looked for the garbage pail.

'You like eating cottage cheese, Mr Smart Alec? Well, let me tell you something. I am a Jewish man and it is well known that Jews like cottage cheese. You, you're a Greek. Greeks like feta and Jews like cottage. That's the way it is. You ever meet a Jew who didn't like cottage cheese?'

Alec had the sudden and unwanted memory of Margaret and Barney sitting in the kitchen and eating cottage cheese with cut-up fruit. 'No,' he said.

'Me,' said the producer. 'Now you've met me and I hate cottage cheese. I would *die* before I ate cottage cheese.'

Alec saw the producer's face go suddenly calm, the anger deflated in mid-sentence. The producer took a deep breath, lit a new cigar, and leaned back in his chair. He had lanky dark hair, which was combed straight back and curled over his ears. Now he took off his sunglasses and rubbed his eyes.

'You know,' the producer said, his voice low, 'that *there* is a great educational movie. A boy, his grandfather, a plate of cottage cheese.'

Alec nodded.

'Roots, the dairy industry, love from one generation to the next.'

Alex nodded.

'No one who ever saw that movie would ever eat cottage cheese again.'

Alec nodded. The producer rubbed his eyes again and Alec wondered if they were getting slightly larger, ready to cry. Barney hadn't warned him about crying.

'Jesus Christ,' the producer said, 'my grandfather knew what roots were. Roots were what grew in the ground. Roots were what you scrabbled for and broke your nails on. You *ate* them, for Christ's sake.'

The tears were definitely starting to form in the producer's eyes. Alec sought desperately for something to console him. 'Times sure have changed,' he finally said.

'I used to beg,' the producer said, 'I used to beg my mother to

send him to a nursing home.' He shrugged and once more laid his hands on the desk. 'All right,' he said, 'maybe you'd better bring the son after all.'

'The son?'

'But not a writer. I don't want to make a goddamn movie about a writer who can't even speak the language.'

'I know,' Alec said, 'he could be a taxi driver. Lots of immigrants are taxi drivers.'

'A taxi driver,' the producer murmured softly. 'Now he wants me to make a movie about a taxi driver.'

Alec looked out the window. On the adjoining roofs the afternoon light had deepened: long shadows draped across the gravel and continued down the brick walls; happy drinkers sat in shorts, watching portable television and drinking beer under the protection of their straw hats. A woman who had been lying face-down on a towel turned her bare chest to the sun. Her illegal nipples jumped like small sparks across the hot city air to Alec's waiting eyes.

'I didn't always do this kind of crap,' the producer sighed. 'In New York, when my agent took me out to lunch, he always paid the bill.'

'He could be a translator,' Alec said, 'if he doesn't know English.'

'No. Make him a cabbie. A cabbie. Me making an educational movie about a taxi driver. And they talk about roots.' The producer turned to the window and Alec got to his feet. The woman was sitting up now, a towel draped over her bare shoulders.

'Half now,' the producer said. 'Half when you give me the first draft.'

That night Alec dreamed of his immigrant again. Then he woke up to the sound of a streetcar clattering by the house. Margaret was sunk deep in sleep: her back and legs formed a long warm breath that nestled into him as he rolled onto his back to stare up at the ceiling.

'Is it fate or just bad luck?'

Margaret stirred beside him, and he turned to see that her eyes were open. In this light they were black, like Rico Carty's big gleaming hands, taunting the pitcher.

'You worry too much,' Barney had said. 'Other people don't have the luxury of worrying like you do.' Barney was married, and the youngest of his three children had been born severely retarded. His wife, after two months in a psychiatric hospital, had decided to care for the child at home. Every Wednesday afternoon she spent in a hotel bedroom with her former psychiatrist. Needing something, she said, to make it up for her. Barney went to baseball games and drank with his friends.

'What do you think of Barney?'

'What?'

'I was just thinking about Barney.'

'Poor Barney,' Margaret said. Her voice was thick with sleep, as if she had been dreaming about him. Sometimes she talked like this; in the middle of a dream she would sit upright to pronounce a few sentences.

'Poor you,' Margaret said. She looked at Alec, a line drive from her eyes to his. Another streetcar rattled by and Alec realized that the room was lightening with the dawn. A few blocks away the immigrant would be waking too, getting ready to put in another day of his own slow crawl.

For a moment Alec held the triangle in his mind: himself, Margaret, the stranger on the sidewalk.

For a moment he could imagine his mind released, the story exploding onto the screen, a perfect triple play with three fates fused together into a single crazily bouncing ball.

Then it slipped out of focus and he saw Margaret's eyes still fastened to his. He caught the look without blinking, or at least he could no longer avoid it: it was a look he was seeing a lot these days: from Margaret as he, waking late, passed the door of the living room and she plunged herself into some new and wild mazurka; from the little girl in the grocery store waiting for him to drop his cigarettes; even from the stranger leaning against the lamp post. A few months ago it had been Annie throwing him these warnings, little coded hints that soon she would settle in favour of a supporting actor.

The expatriate too saw the first yellow of the sun. Soon it would descend full force on the city, a partying man ready to pound his life out on a concrete piano. He could hear the shallow breathing of his nephew, and at his nephew's child-size desk the expatriate was

sitting, his knees painfully compressed. In front of him was the doll he had created. It had no face, but the expatriate still wondered if the blank white cotton was secretly happy.

'So,' Alec said, 'it's come to that.' He climbed out of bed, letting his bare feet search out the hardwood floor. It was time for a change, time to become an unemployed cabbie again. He would even switch from scotch to beer. 'Next year,' Barney had said, 'next year buy season tickets.'